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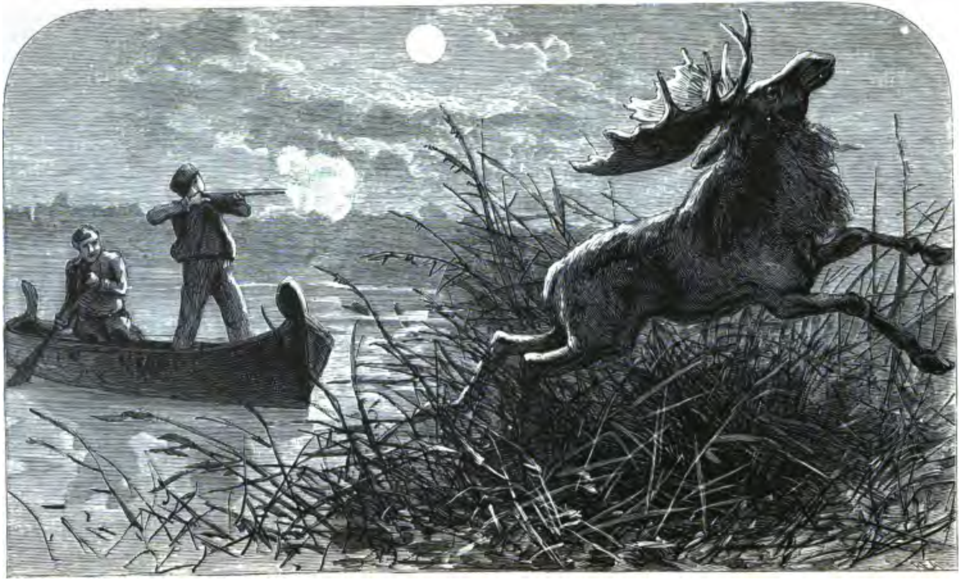


DON'S FAMOUS SHOT.

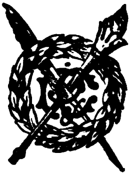
ROD AND GUN SERIES.

THE

ROD AND GUN CLUB.

By HARRY CASTLEMON,

AUTHOR OF "THE GUNBOAT SERIES," "BOY TRAPPER SERIES,"
"ROUGHING IT SERIES," ETC.



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THE ROD AND GUN CLUB.

CHAPTER I.

SOME DISGUSTED BOYS.

"WELL, young man, I will tell you, for your satisfaction, that I have got you provided for, for four long years to come."

The speaker was Mr. Brigham. As he uttered these words he placed his hat and gloves on the table, and looked down at his son Lester, who had just entered the library in obedience to the summons he had received, and who sat on the edge of the sofa, twirling his cap in his hands. The boy looked frightened, while the expression on his father's face told very plainly that he was angry about something.

"I have had quite enough of your nonsense," continued Mr. Brigham, in very decided tones. "Since we came to Mississippi you have done nothing but roam about the woods and fields with your gun on your shoulder, and get yourself into trouble. You made yourself so very disagreeable that none of the decent boys in the settlement would have anything to do with you, and consequently you had to take up with such fellows as Bob Owens and Dan Evans. After setting fire to Don Gordon's shooting-box, and being caught in the act of stealing David Evans's quails, you had to go and mix yourself up in that mail robbery. Why, Lester, have you any idea where you will bring up if you do not at once begin to mend your ways?"

"Why, father, I had nothing to do with that," exclaimed Lester, trying to look surprised and innocent; "nothing whatever. You know, as well as I do, that I was at home when those men who lived in that house-boat waylaid and robbed the mail-carrier."

"I am aware that you took no active part in the work," said his father. "If you had, you would now be confined in the calaboose. But you told Dan Evans about those checks for five thousand dollars that my agent sends me every month."

"I didn't," interrupted Lester.

"Everything goes to prove that you did," answered Mr. Brigham. "If you didn't, how does it come that Dan knew all about those checks? He made a full confession to Don Gordon. The story is all over the country, and the people about here are very angry at you. Suppose that Dan had shot Don Gordon, as he tried to do? What do you suppose would become of you? I really believe you would have been mobbed before this time. I wonder if you have any idea of the excitement you have raised in the settlement?"

No; Lester had not the faintest conception of it, for the simple reason that he had held no conversation with anybody, save the members of his own family, since the afternoon on which Dan Evans was overpowered and robbed of his mail-bag. When the full particulars of the affair came to his ears, he was as frightened as a boy could be, and live. He knew that he was in a measure responsible for the robbery, that it would never have been committed if he had held his tongue regarding his father's money, and the fear that he had rendered himself liable to punishment at the hands of the law, nearly drove him frantic. His terror was greatly increased by his father's last words. There had not been so much excitement in the settlement since the war — not even when it became known that Clarence Gordon and Godfrey Evans had dug up a portion of the general's potato patch, in the hope of unearthing eighty thousand dollars in gold and silver that were supposed to be buried there. Don Gordon had more friends than any other boy in the settlement, unless it was Bert, and the planters were enraged at the attempt that had been made upon his life. If Dan Evans's bullet had found a lodgment in his body instead of going harmlessly through the roof, Dan and Lester Brigham, as well as the three flatboatmen who stole the mail, might have had a hard time of it.

Lester's first care was to hide himself in the house, as he had done after he and Bob Owens burned Don's old shooting-box. He earnestly hoped that the men would escape with their plunder; but when he learned that a strong party, led by General Gordon, had pursued them in Davis's sailboat and captured them, he was ready to give up in despair. Judge Packard would have to look into the matter now through his judicial spectacles, and Lester did not want to be summoned to appear as a witness. Neither did Dan, who, disregarding the advice Don Gordon had given him, took to the woods and hid there, just as he did after he picked his father's pocket of the hundred and sixty dollars that David had made by trapping quails.

When Mr. Brigham saw that Lester took to staying in the house, and that he had suddenly lost all interest in hunting and shooting, his suspicions were aroused. He always kept his ears open when he went to the landing, and by putting together the disjointed scraps of conversation he overheard while he was waiting for his mail, he finally accumulated a mass of evidence against his son Lester that fairly staggered him.

"I couldn't believe this of you until I went to Gordon and asked him what he knew about it," continued Mr. Brigham. "Then the whole story came out. Lester, you will have to go away from here."

"That's just what I want to do," exclaimed the boy, in joyous tones. "I never did like this place. It is awful lonely and dull, and there is no one for me to associate with. If I could only go off somewhere on a visit——"

"As I told you, at the start, I have got things fixed for you for four years to come," said Mr. Brigham. "You ought to have something to do—something that will occupy your mind so completely that you will have no time to be discontented or to think of anything wrong. I have decided to send you to school; and I am sorry I didn't do it long ago."

When Lester heard this he threw his cap spitefully down upon the floor, planted his elbow viciously upon the arm of the lounge, and looked very sullen indeed. School-rooms and school-books were his pet aversions.

"I don't want you to do that," said he, angrily. "I would much rather stay here."

"Do you want to grow up in ignorance?" demanded his father.

If Lester had given an honest response to this question it would have been: "No, I don't want to grow up in ignorance, but I do want to live at my ease. I desire to go to some place where I can find plenty to amuse me, and where I shall have no labor to perform, either mental or manual." But he did not quite like to say that, and so he said nothing.

"You don't know a single thing that a boy of your age ought to know," continued Mr. Brigham. "I have just had a long conversation with Gordon and his two boys."

Lester looked up with a startled expression on his face. "You haven't determined to send me to Bridgeport, have you?" he exclaimed.

"I have," was the decided answer.

"To the military academy?" asked Lester, in louder and more incredulous tones.

"That's the very place. The systematic drill and training you will there receive, will be of the greatest benefit to you, if you are only willing to profit by them. That school has made men of Don and Bert Gordon already."

"I should say so," sneered Lester, suddenly recalling some items of information that had come to him in a round-about way. "Don has been in a constant row with the teachers ever since he has been there."

"That is not true. He got himself into trouble when he first entered the school, and lost his shoulder-straps by it; but he has toned down wonderfully under the influence of those three boys he brought home with him, and he is bound to make his mark before his four years' course is completed."

"But, father, do you know that the teachers are awful hard on the boys—that if a student looks out of the wrong corner of his eye, or breaks the smallest one of the thousand and more rules that he is expected to keep constantly in mind, he is punished for it?" asked Lester, who was almost ready to cry with vexation. It was bad enough, he told himself, to be sent away to any school against his will; but it was worse for his father to select a military academy, and then to hold that embodiment of mischief and rebellion, Don Gordon, up to him as an object worthy of emulation. Lester had no desire to learn the tactics, and he dreaded the discipline to which he knew he would be subjected.

"I heard all about it during my talk with Don and Bert," replied his father. "A strong hand and plenty of work are just what you need."

"But do you know that Bert is first sergeant of the company to which I shall probably be assigned, and that one of its corporals is a New York boot-black? Do you want me to obey the orders of a street Arab?"

"He could not have attained to the position he holds unless he had proved himself worthy of it. The majority of the students, however, are the sons of wealthy men, and they are the ones I want you to choose for your associates. Make friends with them and bring some of them home with you, as Don and Bert did, or go home with them, if they ask you. My word for it, you will see plenty of sport there, if you will only do your duty faithfully. Gordon's boys are impatient to go back; and yet there was a time when Don disliked school as heartily as you do."

"When shall we start for Bridgeport?"

"A week from next Wednesday. New students are received up to the 13th of the month; so we must make our application two days before the school begins."

"Of course we'll not go up on the same boat with the Gordons?"

"Why not? Having been there before, they can save us a great deal of trouble by telling us just where to go and what to do."

"But I don't like the idea of traveling in their company. They will snub me every chance they get."

"You need not borrow any trouble on that score. They have good reasons for disliking you, but if you conduct yourself properly, you will have nothing to fear from them. Now, Lester, promise me that, if you are admitted to that school, you will wake up and try to accomplish something. I will do everything I can to aid and encourage you, and I will begin by putting it in your power to hold your own with the richest student there."

Lester perfectly understood his father's last words, and he was considerably mollified by them. If there were anything that could reconcile him to becoming a member of the military academy, it was the knowledge of the fact that a liberal supply of spending money was to be placed at his disposal. Lester's highest ambition was to be looked up to as a leader among his companions. He had failed to accomplish his object so far as the boys about Rochdale were concerned, but he was pretty sure that he would not fail at Bridgeport. He didn't, either. His money, which Mr. Brigham might better have kept in his own pocket, brought him to the notice of some uneasy fellows at the academy, who joined him in a daring enterprise, the like of which had never been heard of before.

It gave the village people something to talk about, and furnished the law-abiding students with any amount of fun and excitement. In fact the whole school term was crowded so full of thrilling incidents, so many things happened to take their minds off their books, that when the examination was held, some of the best scholars narrowly escaped being dropped from their classes.

"I will do anything I can for you," repeated Mr. Brigham, seating himself in the nearest chair and taking a newspaper from the table. "If you will go through the four years' course with flying colors, and come out at the head of your class, I shall be highly gratified, and I assure you that you will lose nothing by it."

Mr. Brigham fastened his eyes upon his paper, and Lester, taking this as a hint that he had nothing more to say just then, picked up his cap and went out. He made his way directly to his own room, and taking his squirrel rifle down from the antlers that supported it—purchased antlers they were, and not trophies of the boy's own skill—he buckled a cartridge belt about his waist and left the house. He wanted to go off in the woods by himself and think the matter over; but it is hard to tell why he took his rifle with him, for he had no intention of hunting, and he could not have killed anything if he had. Perhaps it was because he had fallen into the habit of carrying a weapon on his shoulder wherever he went, just as Godfrey and Dan did.

"It is some comfort to know that the governor is not disposed to put me on short allowance," thought he, as he sat down on a log and rested his rifle across his knees, "and perhaps I can manage to stand it for a while. If I can't, and father won't let me come home, I'll skip out, as Bob Owens did; only I'll not go into the army. But it can't be all work and no play up there. There must be some jolly fellows among the students who are in for having a good time now and then, and they are the ones I shall run with. I am sorry Bert is an officer, for he will tyrannize over me in every possible way. I feel disgusted whenever I think of that."

Lester Brigham was not the only boy in the world who felt disgusted that day. There were three others that we know of. One of them lived away off in Maryland, and the others lived in Rochdale. The last were Don and Bert Gordon.

When their father came into the room in which they were sitting and told them that Mr. Brigham was waiting to see them in the parlor, they followed him lost in wonder, which gave place to a very different feeling when they learned that this visitor had come there to make some inquiries regarding the Bridgeport military academy, with a view of sending his son there. Bert gave truthful replies to all his questions, and so did Don, for the matter of that; but he did not neglect to enlarge upon the severity of the discipline, or to call Mr. Brigham's attention to the fact that no boy need go to that school expecting to keep pace with his classes, unless he was willing to study hard. Believing that Lester would make trouble one way or another, Don did not want him there, and he hoped to convince Mr. Brigham that the academy at Bridgeport would not at all suit Lester; but he did not succeed. The visitor seemed to believe that military drill was just what his refractory son needed, asked the boys when they were going to start, thanked them for the information they had given him, and took his leave.

"Well, now, I am disgusted," exclaimed Don;

while Bert went over to the window and drummed upon it with his fingers.

"I don't see how you are going to help yourselves, boys," said the general. "Lester Brigham has as much right to go to that school as you have."

"I know that," replied Don. "But I don't want him there, all the same."

"Neither do I," said Bert. "He will be in my company, and if I make him toe the mark, he will say that I do it because I want to be revenged on him for burning Don's shooting-box and getting Dave Evans into trouble."

"Do your duty as a soldier, and let Lester say what he pleases," said the general.

"Oh! he'll have to," exclaimed Don. "If he doesn't, he will be reported. Bert's got to walk a chalk line now, and if he makes a false step, off come his diamond and *chevrons*. It's some consolation to know that we can't introduce him to Egan and the rest. They would snub us in a minute if we did, and serve us right, too. A plebe must be content to wait until the upper-class boys get ready to speak to him."

"Having passed four years of my life in that academy I am not ignorant of that fact," said the general, after a little pause, during which he recalled to mind how he had once had his face washed in a snow-drift by a couple of second-class boys whom he had presumed to address on terms of familiarity. "But I hope you will do all you can for Lester. Remember how lonely you felt when you first went there, and found yourselves surrounded by those who were utter strangers to you."

"Oh, we will," said Bert, while Don scowled savagely but said nothing. "If he will show us that he has come there with the determination to do the best he can, we'll stand by him; won't we, Don?"

Of course the latter said they would, but he gave the promise simply because his father desired it, and not because he had any friendly feeling for Lester Brigham.

The other disgusted boy was Egan, who, on this particular day, was pacing up and down the back veranda of his father's house, shaking his fist at the surf that was rolling in upon the beach, and acting altogether like one whose reflections were by no means agreeable. What it was that had happened to annoy him, we will let him tell in his own way.

Christmas, with its festivities, was now a memory. New Year's day came and went, and Don and Bert, each in his own way, began making preparations for their return to Bridgeport. The latter, who was determined that the close of another school year should find him with at least one bar on his shoulder, devoted his morning hours to his books, while Don, to quote his own language, proceeded to put himself through a regular course of training. There was a long siege of hard study before him, but one would have thought, by the way he went to work, that he was preparing himself for a physical rather than an intellectual contest. He rode hard, hunted perseveringly, kept up his regular exercise with Indian clubs and dumb-bells, and looked, as he said he felt, as if he were good for any amount of work.

Knowing how valuable a little advice would have been to them when they first joined the academy, Don and Bert rode over to see Lester, intending to give him some idea of the nature of the examination he would have to pass before he would be received as a student, and to drop a few hints that would enable him to keep out of trouble; but they never repeated the experiment. Lester was surly and not at all sociable; and he was so very independent, and seemed to have so much confidence in his ability to make his way without help from anybody, that his visitors took their leave without saying half as much to him as they had intended.

"I know what they are up to," said Lester, who stood at the window watching Don and Bert as they rode away. "They have reasons for wishing to get on the right side of me. Somebody has probably told them that I am to have plenty of money to spend, and they intend that I shall spend some of it for their own benefit. I am going in for a shoulder-strap—I am not one to be satisfied with a sergeant's warrant—and the first thing I shall do, after I get it, will be to take those stripes off Bert Gordon's arms. He and his boot-black can't order *me* around."

This soliloquy will show that Lester had changed his mind in regard to the school at Bridgeport. He wanted to go there now. His father, who knew nothing about the academy beyond what Don and Bert had told him, and who judged it by the fashionable boarding-schools at which he had obtained the little knowledge he possessed, had neglected no opportunity to impress upon Lester's mind the fact that a rich man's son would not be allowed to remain long in the ranks, and that there was nothing to prevent him from winning and wearing an officer's sword, if he would only use a little tact in pushing himself forward. After listening to such counsel as this, it was not at all likely that anything that Don and Bert could say would have any influence with him.

"He thinks he is going to have a walk over," said Don, as he stroked his pony's glossy mane.

"It looks that way, but there's where he is mistaken," replied Bert. "Lester will be walking an extra before he has been at the academy a week."

"Well, we'll not volunteer any more advice, no matter what happens to him," said Don. "We'll let him go as he pleases and see how he will come out."

The day set for their departure came at last, and Don and Bert, accompanied by Mr. Brigham and Lester, set out for Bridgeport, which they reached without any mishap. They rode in the same hack from the depot to the academy, and when they alighted at the door, they were surrounded by a crowd of boys who had already reported for duty, and who made it a point to rush out of the building to extend a noisy welcome to every newcomer. School was not yet in session, and the first-class boys were not above speaking to a plebe.

Among those who were first to greet Don and Bert as they stepped out of the hack, were Egan, Hopkins and Curtis. As these young gentlemen had already completed the regular academic course, perhaps the reader would like to know what it was that brought them back. They came to take what was called the "finishing course," and to put themselves under technical instruction. After that (it took two years to go through it) Hopkins was to enter a lawyer's office in Baltimore; Egan intended to become assistant engineer to a relative who was building railroads somewhere in South America; while Curtis was looking towards West Point.

The boys who composed these advanced classes were privileged characters. They dressed in citizens' clothes, performed no military duty, boarded in the village, and came and went whenever they pleased. When the students went into camp, they were at liberty to go with them, or they could stay at the academy and study. If they chose the camp, they could ask to be appointed aids or orderlies at headquarters, or they could put on a uniform, shoulder a musket, and fall into the ranks. They held no office, and the boy who was lieutenant-colonel last year, was nothing better than a private now.

Don and Bert greeted their friends cordially, and as soon as the latter could free himself from their clutches, he beckoned to Mr. Brigham and Lester, who followed him through the hall and into the superintendent's room.

CHAPTER II.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER.

"WHICH one of these trunks do you belong to, Gordon?" inquired a young second-lieutenant, whose duty it was to see that the students were assigned to rooms as fast as they arrived.

"The one with the canvas cover is mine," replied Don.

"Any preference among the boys?" asked the lieutenant. "You can't have Bert for a room-mate this term, you know. The second sergeant of his company will be chummed on him."

Don replied that he didn't care who he had for a companion, so long as he was a well-behaved boy; whereupon the lieutenant beckoned to a negro porter whom he called "Rosebud," and directed him to take Don's trunk up to No. 45, third floor.

"By the way, I suppose that that fellow who has just gone into the superintendent's room with Bert is a crony of yours?" continued the young officer.

"He is from Mississippi," said Don. He did not wish to publish the fact that Lester Brigham was no friend of his, for that would prejudice the students against him at once. Lester was likely to have a hard time of it at the best, and Don did not want to say or do anything that would make it harder for him.

"All right," said the officer. "I will take pains to see that he is chummed on some good fellow."

"You needn't put yourself to any trouble for him on my account," said Don in a low tone, at the same time turning his back upon a sprucely-dressed but rather brazen-faced boy, who persisted in crowding up close to him and Egan, as if he meant to hear every word that passed between them. "He is nothing to me, and I wish he was back where he came from. He'll wish so too, before he has been here many days. I said everything I could to induce his father to keep him at home, but he——"

"Let's take a walk as far as the gate," said Egan, seizing Don by the arm and nodding to

Hopkins and Curtis. "You stay here, Enoch," he added, turning to the sprucely-dressed boy.

"What's the reason I can't go too?" demanded the latter.

"Because we don't want you," replied Egan, bluntly. "I told you before we left home, that you needn't expect to hang on to my coat-tails. Make friends with the members of your own company, for they are the only associates you will have after school begins."

"But they are all strangers to me, and you won't introduce me," said Enoch.

"Then pitch in and get acquainted, as I did when I first came here. You may be sure I'll not introduce you," said Egan, in a low voice, as he and his three friends walked toward the gate. "An introduction is an indorsement, and I don't indorse any such fellows as you are."

"What's the matter with him?" asked Don, who had never seen Egan so annoyed and provoked as he was at that moment.

"Everything," replied the ex-sergeant. "He's the meanest boy I ever met—I except nobody—and if he doesn't prove to be a second Clarence Duncan, I shall miss my guess."

"The boy who came here with me will make a good mate for him," said Don.

"This fellow's father has only recently moved into our neighborhood," continued Egan. "He went into ecstasies over my uniform the first time he saw it, and wanted to know where I got it, and how much it cost, and all that sort of thing. Of course I praised the school and everybody and everything connected with it; but I wish now that I had kept still. The next time that I met him he told me that when I returned to Bridgeport he was going with me. I was in hopes he wouldn't stick, but he did."

"Mr. Brigham crowded Lester upon Bert and me in about the same way," said Don.

"Was that Lester Brigham?" exclaimed Curtis—"the boy who burned your old shooting-box and kicked up that rumpus while we were at Rochdale? We often heard you speak of him, but you know we never saw him."

"He's the very one," replied Don.

"Then he will make a good mate for Enoch Williams," said Egan. "Why, Don, this fellow has been caught in the act of looting ducks on the bay."

Egan's tone and manner seemed to indicate that he looked upon this as one of the worst offenses that could be committed, and both he and Hopkins were surprised because Don did not grow angry over it.

"What's looting ducks?" asked the latter.

"It is a system of hunting pursued by the pot-hunters of Chesapeake bay, who shoot for the market and not for sport. A huge blunderbuss, which will hold a handful of powder and a pound or more of shot, and which is kept concealed during the day-time, is put into the bow of a skiff at night, and carried into the very midst of a flock of sleeping ducks; and sometimes the men who manage it, secure as many as sixty or seventy birds at one discharge. The law expressly prohibits it, and denounces penalties against those who are caught at it."

"Then why wasn't Enoch punished?"

"Because everybody is afraid to complain of him or of any one else who violates the law. It isn't safe to say anything against these duck-shooters, and those who do it are sure to suffer. Their yachts will be bored full of holes, their oyster-beds dragged at night or filled with sharp things for the dredges to catch on, their lobster-pots pulled up and destroyed or carried off, their retrievers shot or stolen—oh, it wouldn't take long to raise an excitement down there that would be fully equal to that which was occasioned in Rochdale by that mail robbery."

If the reader will bear these words in mind, he will see that subsequent events proved the truthfulness of them. The professional duck-shooters who played such havoc with the wild fowl in Chesapeake bay, were determined and vindictive men, and it was very easy to get into trouble with them, especially when there were such fellows as Enoch Williams and Lester Brigham to help it along.

The four friends spent half an hour in walking about the grounds, talking over the various exciting and amusing incidents that had happened while they were living in *Don Gordon's Shooting-Box*, and then Don went to his dormitory to put on his uniform, preparatory to reporting his arrival to the superintendent. Every train that steamed into the station brought a crowd of students with it, and the evening of the 14th of January found them all snug in their quarters, and ready for the serious business of the term, which was to begin with the booming of the morning gun. All play was over now. There had been guard-mount that morning, sentries were posted on the grounds and in the buildings, and the new students began to see how it seemed to feel the tight reins of military discipline drawn about them. Of course there were a good many who did not like it at all. Events proved that there was a greater number of malcontents in the school this term than there had ever been before. Bold fellows some of them were, too — boys who had always been allowed to do as they pleased at home, and who proceeded to get up a rebellion before they had donned their uniforms. One of them, it is hardly necessary to say, was Lester Brigham. On the morning when the ceremony of guard-mounting was gone through with for the first time, he stood off by himself, muffled up head and ears, and watching the proceeding. Presently his attention was attracted by the actions of a boy who came rapidly along the path, shaking his gloved fists in the air and talking to himself. He did not see Lester until he was close upon him, and then he stopped and looked ashamed.

"What's the trouble?" asked Lester, who was in no very good humor himself.

"Matter enough," replied the boy. "I wish I had never seen or heard of this school."

"Here too," said Lester. "Are you a new scholar? Then we belong to the same class and company."

"I wouldn't belong to any class or company if I could help it," snapped the boy. "My father didn't want me to come here, but I insisted, like the dunce I was, and now I've got to stay."

"So have I; but I didn't come of my own free will. My father made me."

"Get into any row at home?" asked the boy.

"Well—yes," replied Lester, hesitatingly.

"I don't see that it is anything to be ashamed of. You look like a city boy; did the cops get after you?"

"No; I had no trouble with the police, but I thought for a while that I was going to have. I live in the canebrakes of Mississippi, and my name is Lester Brigham. I used to live in the city, and I wish I had never left it."

"My name is Enoch Williams, and I am from Maryland," said the other. "I don't live in a cane-brake, but I live on the sea-shore, and right in the midst of a lot of Yahoos who don't know enough to keep them over night. Egan is one of them and Hopkins is another."

"Why, those are two of the boys that Don Gordon brought home with him last fall," exclaimed Lester. "Do you know them?"

"I know Egan very well. His father's plantation is next to ours. If he had been anything of a gentleman, I might have been personally acquainted with Hopkins by this time; but, although we traveled in company all the way from Maryland, he never introduced me. Do you know them?"

"I used to see them occasionally last fall, but I have never spoken to either of them," answered Lester. "By the way, the first sergeant of our company is a near neighbor of mine."

"Do you mean Bert Gordon? Well, he's a little snipe. He throws on more airs than a country dancing-master. I have been insulted ever since I have been here," said Enoch, hotly. "The boys from my own State, who ought to have brought me to the notice of the teachers and of some good fellows among the students, have turned their backs upon me, and told me in so many words, that they don't want my company."

"Don and Bert Gordon have treated me in nearly the same way," observed Lester.

"But, for all that, I have made some acquaintances among the boys in the third class, who gave me a few hints that I intend to act upon," continued Enoch. "They say the rules are very strict, and that it is of no earthly use for me to try to keep out of trouble. There are a favored few who are allowed to do as they please; but the rest of us must walk turkey, or spend our Saturday afternoons in doing extra duty. Now I say that isn't fair—is it, Jones?" added Enoch, appealing to a third-class boy who just then came up.

Jones had been at the academy just a year, and of course he was a member of Don Gordon's class and company. He was one of those who, by the aid of Don's "Yankee Invention," had succeeded in making their way into the fire-escape, and out of the building. They failed to get by the guard, as we know, and Jones was court-martialed as well as the rest. His back and arms ached whenever he thought of the long hours he had spent in walking extras to pay for that one night's fun;

and he had made the mental resolution that before he left the academy he would do something that would make those who remained bear him in remembrance. He was lazy, vicious and idle, and quite willing to back up Enoch's statement.

"Of course it isn't fair," said he, after Enoch had introduced him to Lester Brigham. "You needn't expect to be treated fairly as long as you remain here, unless you are willing to curry favor with the teachers, and so win a warrant or a commission; but that is something no decent boy will do. I can prove it to you. Take the case of Don Gordon: he's a good fellow, in some respects——"

"There's where I differ with you," interrupted Lester. "I have known him for a long time, and I have yet to see anything good about him."

"I don't care if you have. I say he's a good fellow," said Jones, earnestly. "There isn't a better boy in school to run with than Don Gordon would be, if he would only get rid of the notion that it is manly to tell the truth at all times and under all circumstances, no matter who suffers by it. He's as full of plans as an egg is of meat; he is afraid of nothing, and there wasn't a boy in our set who dared join him in carrying out some schemes he proposed. Why, he wanted to capture the butcher's big bull-dog, take him up to the top of the building, and then kick him down stairs after tying a tin-can to his tail! He would have done it, too, if any of the set had offered to help him; but I tell you, I wouldn't have taken a hand in it for all the money there is in America."

"He must be a good one," said Enoch, admiringly.

"Oh, he is. We had many a pleasant evening at Cony Ryan's last winter that we would not have had if Don had not come to our aid; but when the critical moment arrived, he failed us."

"You might have expected it," sneered Lester, who could not bear to hear these words of praise bestowed upon the boy he so cordially hated.

"Well, I didn't expect it. Don was one of the floor-guards that night, and he allowed a lot of us to pass him and go out of the building. When the superintendent hauled him up for it the next day, he acknowledged his guilt, but he would not give our names, although he knew he stood a good chance of being sent down for his refusal. I shall always honor him for that."

"I wish he had been expelled," said Lester, bitterly. "Then I should not have been sent to this school."

"Well, when the examination came off," continued Jones, "Don was so far ahead of his class that none of them could touch him with a ten-foot pole; and yet he is a private to-day, while that brother of his, who won the good-will of the teachers by toadying to them, wears a first sergeant's *chevrons*. Of course such partiality as that is not fair for the rest of us."

"There isn't a single redeeming feature about this school, is there?" said Enoch, after a pause. "A fellow can't enjoy himself in any way."

"Oh, yes, he can—if he is smart and a trifle reckless. He can go to Cony Ryan's and eat pancakes. I suppose Egan told you of the high old times we had here last winter running the guard, didn't he?"

"He never mentioned it," replied Enoch.

"Well, didn't he describe the fight we had with the Indians last camp?"

"Indians!" repeated Enoch, incredulously, while Lester's eyes opened with amazement.

"Yes; sure-enough Indians they were too, and not make-believes. We thought, by the way they yelled at us, that they meant business. Why, they raised such a rumpus about the camp that some of our lady guests came very near fainting, they were so frightened. Didn't Egan tell you how he and Don deserted, swam the creek, went to the show disguised as country boys, and finally fell into the hands of those same Indians who had surrounded the camp and were getting ready to attack us?"

No, Egan hadn't said a word about any of these things to Enoch, and neither had Don or Bert spoken of them to Lester; although they might have done so if the latter had showed them a little more courtesy when they called upon him at his house. Some of the matters referred to were pleasant episodes in the lives of the Bridgeport students, and the reason why Egan had not spoken of them was because he did not want Enoch to think there was anything agreeable about the institution. He didn't want him there, because he did not believe that Enoch would be any credit to the school; and so he did with him just as Don and Bert did with Lester: he enlarged upon the rigor of the discipline, the stern impartiality of the instructors, the promptness with which they called a delinquent to account, and spoke feelingly of their long and difficult lessons; but he never said "recreation" once, nor did he so much as hint that there were certain hours in the day that the students could call their own.

"Tell us about that fight," said Enoch.

"Yes, do," chimed in Lester. "If there is any way to see fun here, let us know what it is."

Jones was just the boy to go to with an appeal of this sort. He was thoroughly posted, and if there were any one in the academy who was always ready to set the rules and regulations at defiance, especially if he saw the shadow of a chance for escaping punishment, Jones was the fellow. He gave a glowing description of the battle at the camp; told how the boys ran the guard, and where they went and what they did after they got out; related some thrilling stories of adventure of which the law-breakers were the heroes; and by the time the dinner-call was sounded, he had worked his two auditors up to such a pitch of excitement that they were ready to attempt almost anything.

"You have given me some ideas," said Enoch, as they hurried toward their dormitories in obedience to the call, "and who knows but they may grow to something? I've got to stay here—I had a plain understanding with my father on that point—and I am going to think up something that will yield us some sport."

"That's the way I like to hear a fellow talk," said Jones, approvingly; "and I will tell you this for your encouragement: we care nothing for the risk we shall run in carrying out your scheme, whatever it may be, but before we undertake it, you must be able to satisfy us that we can carry it out successfully. Do that, and I will bring twenty boys to back you up, if you need so many. We are always glad to have fellows like you come among us, for our tricks grow stale after a while, and we learn new ones of you. Don Gordon can think up something in less time than anybody I ever saw; but it would be useless to look to him for help. Egan and the other good little boys have taken him in hand, and they'll make an officer of him this year; you wait and see if they don't."

"Jones gave me some ideas, too," thought Lester, as he marched into the dining-hall with his company, and took his seat at the table; "but I must say I despise the way he lauded that Don Gordon. Don seems to make friends wherever he goes, and they are among the best, too; while I have to be satisfied with such companions as I can get. I am going to set my wits at work and see if I can't study up something that will throw that bull-dog business far into the shade."

Unfortunately for Lester this was easy of accomplishment. He was not obliged to do any very hard thinking on the subject, for a plan was suggested to him that very afternoon. There was but one objection to it: he would have to wait four or five months before it could be carried out.

Lester's room-mate was a boy who spelled his name Huggins, but pronounced it as though it were written Hewguns. He had showed but little disposition to talk about himself and his affairs, and all Lester could learn concerning him was that he was from Massachusetts, and that he lived somewhere on the sea-coast. He and Lester met in their dormitory after dinner, and while the latter proceeded to put on his hat and overcoat, Huggins threw himself into a chair, buried his hands in his pockets and gazed steadily at the floor.

"What's the matter?" inquired Lester. "You act as if something had gone wrong with you."

"Things never go right with me," was the surly response. "There isn't a boy in the world who has so much trouble as I do."

"I have often thought that of myself," Lester remarked. "Come out and take a walk. Perhaps the fresh air will do you good."

"I don't want any fresh air," growled Huggins. "I want to think. I have been trying all the morning to hit upon something that would enable me to get to windward of my father, and I guess I have got it at last."

"What do you mean by getting to windward of him?" asked Lester.

"Why, getting the advantage of him. If two vessels were racing, the one that was to windward would have the odds of the other, especially if the breeze was not steady, because she would always catch it first. I guess you don't know much about the water, do you?"

"I don't know much about boats," replied Lester; "but when it comes to hunting, fishing or riding, I am there. I have yet to see the fellow who can beat me."

"I am fond of fishing," said Huggins. "I was out on the banks last season. We made a very fine catch, and had a tidy row with the Newfoundland fishermen before we could get our bait."

"What sort of fish did you take?"

"Codfish, of course."

"Do you angle for them from the banks?"

"I said *on* the banks—that is, in shoal water."

"Oh," said Lester. "I don't know anything about that kind of fishing. Did you ever play a fifteen pound brook-trout on an eight-ounce fly-rod?"

"No; nor nobody else."

"I have done it many a time," said Lester. "I tell you it takes a man who understands his business to land a fish like that with light tackle. A greenhorn would have broken his pole or snapped his line the very first jerk he made."

"You may tell that to the marines, but you needn't expect me to believe it," said Huggins, quietly. "In the first place, a fly-fisher doesn't fasten his hook by giving a jerk. He does it by a simple turn of the wrist. In the second place, the *Salmo fontinalis* doesn't grow to the weight of fifteen pounds."

Lester was fairly staggered. He had set out with the intention of giving his room-mate a graphic account of some of his imaginary exploits and adventures (those of our readers who are well acquainted with him will remember that he kept a large supply of them on hand), but he saw that it was time to stop. There was no use in trying to deceive a boy who could fire Latin at him in that way.

"The largest brook-trout that was ever caught was taken in the Rangeley lakes, and weighed a trifle over ten pounds," continued Huggins. "And lastly, the members of the order *Salmonidæ* don't live in the muddy, stagnant bayous you have down South. They want clear cold water."

"Why do you want to get to windward of your father?" inquired Lester, who thought it best to change the subject.

"To pay him for sending me to this school," replied Huggins.

"And you think you know how to do it?"

"I do."

Lester became interested. He took off his hat and overcoat and sat down on the edge of his bed.

CHAPTER III.

LESTER BRIGHAM'S IDEA.

"IF one might judge by the way you talk and act, you didn't want to come to this school," said Lester.

"No, I didn't," answered Huggins. "I don't want to go to any school. The height of my ambition is to become a sailor. I was born in sight of the ocean, and have snuffed its breezes and been tossed about by its waves ever since I can remember. I live near Gloucester, and my father is largely interested in the cod-fishery. He began life as a fisherman, but he owns a good sized fleet now."

"Didn't he want you to go to sea?" asked Lester.

"No. He allowed me to go to the banks now and then, but when I told him that I wanted to make a regular business of it, he wouldn't listen to me. After I got tired of trying to reason with him, I made preparations to run away from home; but he caught me at it, and bundled me off here."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I'm not going to stay. I've been to school before, but I was never snubbed as I have been since I came to Bridgeport. The idea that a boy of my age should be obliged to say 'sir' to every little up-start who wears a shoulder-strap! I'll not do it."

"You'd better. If you don't you will be in trouble continually."

"Let the trouble come. I'll get out of its way."

"How will you do it?"

Huggins shut one eye, looked at Lester with the other, and laid his finger by the side of his nose.

"Oh, you needn't be afraid to trust me," said Lester, who easily understood this pantomime. "Those who are best acquainted with me will tell you that I am true blue. I know just how you feel. I don't like this school any better than you do; I was sent here in spite of all I could say to prevent it. I have been snubbed by the boys in the upper classes because I spoke to them before they spoke to me, and when I see a chance to leave without being caught, I shall improve it."

"I guess I can rely upon you to keep my secret," said Huggins, but it is hard to tell how he reached this conclusion. One single glance at that peaked, freckled face, whose every feature bore evidence to the sneaking character and disposition of its owner, ought to have satisfied him that his room-mate was not a boy who could be confided in.

"You may depend upon me every time," said Lester, earnestly. "I'll bring twenty good fellows to help you."

"Oh, I can't take so many boys with me," said Huggins, looking up in surprise. "I couldn't find berths for them."

"Are you going off on a boat?"

"Of course I am. Some dark night, when all the rest of the fellows are asleep, I am going to slip out of here, take my foot in my hand and draw a bee-line for Oxford; and when I get there, I am going to ship aboard the first sea-going vessel I can find."

"As a sailor?" exclaimed Lester.

"Certainly. I shall have to go before the mast; but I'll not stay there, for I can hand, reef and steer as well as the next man, I don't care where he comes from, and I understand navigation, too."

Lester was sadly disappointed. He hoped and believed that his room-mate was about to propose something in which he could join him.

"I am sorry I can't go with you," said he; "but I don't want to follow the sea."

"Of course you don't, for you belong ashore. I belong on the water, and there's where I am going. Oxford is two hundred miles from Bridgeport, and that is a long distance to walk through snow that is two feet deep."

"You can go on the cars," suggested Lester.

"No, I can't; unless I steal a ride. My father is determined to keep me here, and consequently he does not allow me a cent of money," said Huggins; and he proved it by turning all his pockets inside out to show that they were empty.

"He is mean, isn't he?" said Lester, indignantly. He was about to add that his father had given him a very liberal supply of bills before he set out on his return to Rochdale, but he did not say it, for fear that his friend Huggins might want to borrow a dollar or two.

"But he will find that I am not going to let the want of money stand in my way," added Huggins. "I saw several nice little yachts in their winter quarters when I was at the wharf the other day, and if it were summer we'd get a party of fellows together, run off in one of them, and go somewhere and have some fun. When the time came to separate, each one could go where he pleased. The rest of you could hold a straight course for home, if you felt like it, and I would go to sea."

"That's the very idea," exclaimed Lester. "I wonder why some of the boys didn't think of it long ago. When you get ready to go, count me in."

"I shall not be here to take part in it," replied Huggins. "I hope to be on deep water before many days more have passed over my head."

"I am sorry to hear you say so, for you would be just the fellow to lead an expedition like that. But there's one thing you have forgotten: if you intend to slip away from the academy, you will need help."

"I don't see why I should. I shall not stir until every one is asleep."

"Then you'll not go out at all. There are sentries posted around the grounds at this moment, and as soon as it grows dark, guards will take charge of every floor in this building. It is easy enough to get by the sentries—I know, for some of the boys told me so—but how are you going to pass these floor-guards when they are watching your room?"

"Whew!" whistled Huggins. "They hold a fellow tight, don't they?"

"They certainly do; and it is not a very pleasant state of affairs for one who has been allowed to go and come whenever he felt like it. Your best plan would be to ask for a pass. That will take you by the guards, and when you get off the grounds, you needn't come back."

"But suppose I can't get a pass?"

"Then the only thing you can do is to wait until some of your friends are on duty. They will pass you and keep still about it afterward"

"I haven't a single friend in the school."

"You can make some by simply showing the boys that your heart is in the right place. I must go now to meet an engagement; but I will see you later, and if you like, I will introduce you to a few acquaintances I have made since my arrival, every one of whom you can trust."

As Lester said this, he put on his hat and overcoat and left the room. Huggins had given him an idea, and he wanted to get away by himself and think about it. He did not have time to spend a great deal of study upon it, for as he was about to pass out at the front door, he met Jones, who was just the boy he wanted to see. He was in the company of several members of his class, but a wink and a slight nod of the head quickly brought him to Lester's side.

"Say, Jones," whispered the latter, "I understand that there are a good many yachts owned in this village, and that they are in their winter quarters now. When warm weather comes, what would you say to capturing one of them, and going off somewhere on a picnic?"

"Lester, you're a good one," exclaimed Jones, admiringly.

"Do you think it could be done?"

"I am sure of it," replied Jones, who grew enthusiastic at once. "It's the very idea, and I know the boys will be in for it hot and heavy. It takes the new fellows to get up new schemes. I can see only two objections to it."

"What are they?" inquired Lester.

"The first is, that we can't carry it out under four or five months. Couldn't you think up something that we could go at immediately?"

"I am afraid not," answered Lester. "Where could we go and what could we do if we were to desert now? We could not sleep out of doors with the thermometer below zero, for we would freeze to death. We must have warm weather for our excursion."

"That's so," said Jones, reflectively. "I suppose we shall have to wait, but I don't like to, and neither would you if you knew what we've got to go through with before the ice is all out of the river. The other objection is, that we have no one among us who can manage the yacht after we capture it."

"What's the reason we haven't?"

"Can you do it?"

"I might. I have taken my own yacht in a pleasure cruise around the great lakes from Oswego to Duluth," replied Lester, with unblushing mendacity. "It was while I was in Michigan that I killed some of those bears."

"I didn't know you had ever killed any," said Jones, opening his eyes in amazement.

"Oh, yes, I have. They are also abundant in Mississippi, and one day I kept one of them from chewing up Don Gordon."

"You don't say so. You and Kenyon ought to be chums; there he is," said Jones, directing Lester's attention to a tall, lank young fellow who looked a great deal more like a backwoodsman than he did like a soldier. "He is from Michigan. His father is a lumberman, and Sam had never been out of the woods until a year ago, when he was sent to this school to have a little polish put on him. But he is one of the good little boys. He says he came here to learn and has no time to fool away. Shall I introduce you?"

"By no means," said Lester, hastily. He did not think it would be quite safe. If his friend Jones made him known to Kenyon as a renowned bear-hunter, the latter might go at him in much the same style that Huggins did, and then there would be another exposure. He could not afford to be caught in many more lies if he hoped to make himself a leader among his companions. "Since Kenyon is one of the good boys, I have no desire to become acquainted with him," he added. "And, while I think of it, Jones, don't repeat what I said to you."

"About the bears? I won't."

"Because, if you do, the fellows will say I am trying to make myself out to be somebody, and that wouldn't be pleasant. After I have been here awhile they will be able to form their own opinion of me."

"They will do that just as soon as I tell them about this plan of yours," said Jones. "They'll say you are the boy they have been waiting for. But you will take command of the yacht, after we get her, will you not?"

"Yes; I'll do that."

"It is nothing more than fair that you should have the post of honor, for you proposed it. I will talk the matter up among the fellows before I am an hour older."

"Just one word more," said Lester, as Jones was about to move off. "My room-mate is going to desert and go to sea. If I will make you ac-

quainted with him,
boys who will help

"I'll be glad t
"But tell him to k
have a talk with
drop a hint of wha
ence of some boys
they would carry it
and then Huggins

"If he runs awa
asked Lester.

"To be sure the
sent out in every d
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the worst one in t
with all the certai
except Don Gordo
the slip. Now you
and I will see wha
yacht business. I
twenty minutes."

So saying Jones
ions, while Lester st

The latter was highly gratified by the promptness with which his idea (Huggins's idea, rather) had been indorsed, but he wished he had not said so much about his ability to manage the yacht. He knew as much about sailing as he did about shooting and fishing, that is, nothing at all. He had never seen a pleasure-boat larger than Don Gordon's. If anybody had put a sail into a skiff and told him it was a yacht, Lester would not have known the difference.

"It isn't at all likely that my plan will amount to anything," said Lester, to himself. "I suggested it just because I wanted the fellows to know that there are those in the world who are fully as brave as Don Gordon is supposed to be. But if Jones and his crowd should take me at my word, wouldn't I be in a fix? What in the name of wonder would I do?"

It was evident that Lester was sadly mistaken in the boys with whom he had to deal, and he received another convincing proof of it before half an hour had passed. By the time he had taken a dozen turns up and down the long path, he saw Jones and Enoch Williams hurrying to meet him. The expression on their faces told him that they had what they considered to be good news to communicate.

"It's all right, Brigham," said Jones, in a gleeful voice. "The boys are in for it, as I told you they would be, and desired us to say to you that you could not have hit upon anything that would suit them better. I have been counting noses, and have so far found fifteen good fellows upon whom you can call for help any time you want it. They all agreed with me when I suggested that you ought to have the management of the whole affair."

"Where did you learn yachting, Brigham?" asked Enoch.

"On the lakes," replied Lester.

"Then you must be posted. I have heard that they have some hard storms up there occasionally."

"You may safely say that. It is almost always rough off Saginaw bay," answered Lester; and that was true, but he did not know it by experience. He had heard somebody say so.

"I am something of a yachtsman myself," continued Enoch. "I brought my little schooner from Great South Bay, Long Island, around into Chesapeake bay. Of course my father laid the course for me, and kept his weather eye open to see that I didn't make any mistakes; but I gave the orders myself, and handled the vessel."

Lester, who had been on the point of entertaining his two friends by telling of some thrilling adventures that had befallen him during his imaginary cruise from Oswego to Duluth, opened his eyes and closed his lips when he heard this. He saw that his chances for making a hero of himself were growing smaller every hour. He was afraid to talk about fishing in the presence of his roommate; he dared not speak of bears while he was in the hearing of Sam Kenyon; and it would not be at all safe for him to enlarge upon his knowledge of seamanship, for here was a boy at his elbow who had sailed his own yacht on deep water. He was doomed to remain in the background, and to be of no more consequence at the academy than any other plebe. He could see that very plainly.

"There's a splendid little boat down there near the wharf," continued Enoch, who was as deeply in love with the water and everything connected with it as Huggins was, although he had no desire to go before the mast. "I bribed her keeper to let me take a look at her the other day, and I tell you her appointments are perfect. I should say that her cabin and forecastle would accommodate about twenty boys. But this is cutter-rigged, and I don't know anything about vessels of that sort; do you?"

"I've seen lots of them," answered Lester.

"I suppose you have; but did you ever handle one?"

Lester replied that his own boat was a cutter; and when he said it, he had as clear an idea of what he was talking about as he had of the Greek language.

"Then we are all right," said Enoch. "They look top-heavy to me, and I shouldn't care to trust myself out in one during a gale, unless there was a sailorman in charge of her. But if we get her and find that she is too much for us, we can send the yard down and make a sloop of her. It wouldn't pay to have her capsize with us."

Lester shuddered at the mere mention of such a thing; and while Enoch continued to talk in this way, filling his sentences full of nautical terms, that were familiar enough to him and quite unintelligible to Lester, the latter set his wits at work to conjure up some excuse for backing out when the critical time came. He was not at all fond of the water, he was afraid to run the risk of capture and punishment, and he sincerely hoped that something would happen to prevent the proposed excursion.

"Of course we can't decide upon the details until the time for action arrives," said Jones, at length. "But you have given us something to think of and to look forward to, and we are indebted to you for that. Now, let's call upon your room-mate and see what we can do to help him."

Lester led the way to his dormitory, and as he opened the door rather suddenly, he and his companion surprised Huggins in the act of making up a small bundle of clothing. He was startled by this abrupt entrance, and he must have been frightened as well, for his face was as white as a sheet.

"It's all right, Huggins," said Lester, who at once proceeded with the ceremony of introduction. "You needn't be afraid of these fellows."

"Of course not," assented Jones. "We know that you intend to take French leave, but it is all right, and if there is any way in which we can help you, we hope you will not hesitate to say so."

Huggins did not seem to be fully reassured by these words. The pallor did not leave his face, and the visitors noticed that he trembled as he seated himself on the edge of his bed.

"I am obliged to you, but I don't think I shall need any assistance. This will see me through the lines, will it not?" said Huggins, pulling from his pocket a piece of paper on which was written an order for all guards and patrols to pass private Albert Huggins until half-past nine o'clock. The printed heading showed that it was genuine.

"Yes, that's all you need to take you by the guards," said Jones. "And when half-past nine comes, you will be a long way from here, I suppose."

"I shall be as far off as my feet can carry me by that time," replied Huggins. "But don't tell any one which way I have gone, will you?"

"If you were better acquainted with us you would know that your caution is entirely unnecessary," said Jones. "But you are not going to walk two hundred miles, are you? Why don't you go by rail?"

"How can I when I have no money?"

"Are you strapped?" exclaimed Enoch. "I can spare you a dollar."

"I'll give you another," said Jones, looking at Lester.

"I'll—I'll give another," said the latter; but he uttered the words with the greatest reluctance. He was always ready to spend money, but he wanted to know, before he parted with it, that it was going to bring him some pleasure in return. As he spoke he made a step toward his trunk, but Huggins earnestly, almost vehemently, motioned him back.

"No, no, boys," said he, "I'll not take a cent from any of you. I am used to roughing it, and I shall get through all right. All I ask of you is to keep away so as not to direct attention to me. How soon will my absence be discovered?"

"That depends upon the floor-guard," answered Jones. "If he is one of those sneaking fellows who is forever sticking his nose into business that does not concern him, he will report your absence to the officer of the guard when he makes his rounds at half-past nine. If the floor-guard keeps his mouth shut, no one will know you are gone until the morning roll is called. In any event no effort will be made to find you until to-morrow."

"And then I may expect to be pursued, I suppose?"

"You may; and if you are not caught, it will be a wonder. Every effort will be made to capture you, for don't you see that if you were permitted to escape, other boys would be encouraged to take French leave in the same way? Now, listen to me, and I will give you some advice that may be of use to you."

If his advice, which was given with the most friendly intentions, had been favorably received, Jones would have said a good deal more than he did; but he very soon became aware that his words of warning were falling on deaf ears. Huggins was not listening to him. He was unaccountably nervous and excited, and Jones, believing that he would be better pleased by their absence than he was with their company, gave the signal for leaving by picking up his cap. He lingered long enough to shake hands with Huggins and wish him good luck in outwitting his pursuers and finding a vessel, and then he went out, followed by Enoch and Lester.

"How strangely he acted!" said the latter.

"Didn't he?" exclaimed Enoch. "He seemed frightened at our offer to give him a few dollars to help him along. What was there wrong in that? If I had been in his place I would not have refused. Now he can take his choice between begging his food and going hungry."

"I don't envy him his long, cold walk," observed Jones. "And where is he going to find a bed when night comes? The people in this country don't like tramps any too well, and the first time he stops at a farm-house he may be interviewed by a bull-dog."

Lester did not find an opportunity to talk with his room-mate again that day. They marched down to supper together, and as soon as the ranks were broken, Huggins made all haste to put on his hat and overcoat, secure his bundle and quit the room. He would hardly wait to say good-by to Lester, and didn't want the latter to go with him as far as the gate.

"He's well out of his troubles, and mine are just about to begin," thought Lester, as he stood on the front steps and saw Huggins disappear in the darkness. "I would run away myself if I were not afraid of the consequences. It wouldn't be safe to try father's patience too severely, for there is no telling what he would do to me."

Lester strolled about until the bugle sounded "to quarters," and then he went up to his room, where he passed a very lonely evening. No one dared to come near him, and if he had attempted to leave his room, he would have been ordered back by the floor-guard. He knew he ought to study, but still he would not do it. It would be time enough, he thought, to take up his books, when he could see no way to get out of it.

Lester went to bed long before taps, and slept soundly until he was aroused by the report of the morning gun, and the noise of the fifes and drums in the drill-room. Having been told that he would have just six minutes in which to dress, he got into his clothes without loss of time, and fell into the ranks just as the last strains of the morning call died away.

CHAPTER IV.

FLIGHT AND PURSUIT.

"FOURTH company. All present or accounted for with the exception of Private Albert Huggins," said Bert Gordon, as he faced about and raised his hand to his cap.

"Where is Private Huggins?" demanded Captain Clayton.

"I don't know, sir. He had a pass last night, and he seems to have abused it. At any rate he is not in the ranks to answer to his name."

Captain Clayton reported to the adjutant, who in turn reported to the officer of the day, and then the ranks were broken, and the young soldiers hurried to their dormitories to wash their hands and faces, comb their hair, and get ready for morning inspection. While Bert and his room-mate were thus engaged, an orderly opened the door long enough to say that Sergeant Gordon was wanted in the superintendent's office.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Sergeant Elmer—that was the name and rank of Bert's room-mate—"you are going out after Huggins, most likely. If you have the making up of the detail don't forget me."

Bert said he wouldn't, and hastened out to obey the summons. As he was passing along the hall he was suddenly confronted by Lester Brigham, who jerked open the door of his room and shouted "Police! Police!" at the top of his voice.

"What's the matter with you?" exclaimed Bert, wondering if Lester had taken leave of his senses.

"I've been robbed!" cried Lester, striding up and down the floor, in spite of all Bert could do to quiet him. "That villain Huggins broke open my trunk and took a clean hundred dollars in money out of it."

Lester's wild cries had alarmed everybody on that floor, and the hall was rapidly filling with students who ran out of their rooms to see what was the matter.

"Go back, boys," commanded Bert. "You have not a moment to waste. If your rooms are not ready for inspection you will be reported and punished for it. Go back, every one of you."

He emphasized this order by pulling out his note-book and holding his pencil in readiness to write down the name of every student who did not yield prompt obedience. The boys scattered in every direction, and when the hall was cleared, Bert seized Lester by the arm and pulled him into his room.

"No yelling now," said he sternly.

"Must I stand by and let somebody rob me without saying a word?" vociferated Lester.

"By no means; but you can act like a sane boy and report the matter in a quiet way, can't you? Now explain, and be quick about it, for the superintendent wants to see me."

"Why, Huggins has run away—he intended to do it when he got that pass last night—and he has taken every dollar I had in the world to help himself along. Just look here," said Lester, picking up the hasp of his trunk which had been broken in two in the middle. "Huggins did that yesterday, and I never knew it until a few minutes ago. I went to my trunk to get out a clean collar, and then I found that the hasp was broken, and that my clothes were tumbled about in the greatest confusion. I looked for my money the first thing, but it was gone."

"Don't you know that it is against the rules for a student to have more than five dollars in his possession at one time?" asked Bert. "If you had lived up to the law and given your money into the superintendent's keeping, you would not have lost it."

"What do I care for the law?" snarled Lester.

"You ought to care for it. If you didn't intend to obey it, you had no business to sign the muster-roll."

"Well, who's going to get my hundred dollars back for me? That's what I want to know," cried Lester, who showed signs of going off into another flurry.

"I don't know that any one can get it back for you," said Bert quietly. "It is possible that you may never see it again."

"Then I'll see some more just like it, you may depend upon that," said Lester, walking nervously up and down the floor and shaking his fists in the air. "I was robbed in the superintendent's house, and he is bound to make my loss good."

"There's where you are mistaken. You took your own risk by disobeying the rules——"

"The money was mine and the superintendent had no more right to touch it than you had," interrupted Lester. "My father gave it to *me* with his own hands, because he wanted I should have a fund by me that I could draw on without asking anybody's permission."

"Well, you see what you made by it, don't you? How do you know that Huggins has run away?"

"He told me he was going to. I offered to give him a dollar to help him along, and so did Jones and Williams."

"You ought not to have done that."

"I don't care; I did it, and this is the way he repaid me. I'll bet he had my money in his pocket when he refused my offer. I thought he acted queer, and so did the other boys."

"Do you know which way he intended to go?"

"He said he was going to draw a bee-line for Oxford, and ship on the first vessel he could find that would take him to sea. Are you going after him?" inquired Lester, as Bert turned toward the door. "Look here: if you will follow him up and get my money back for me, I'll—I'll lend you five dollars of it, if you want it."

Lester was about to say that he would *give* Bert that amount, but he caught his breath in time, and saved five dollars by it. He knew very well that Bert would never be obliged to ask him for money.

The sergeant hurried down to the superintendent's office, where he found the officer of the day, who had just been making his report.

"I understand that Private Huggins abused my confidence, and that he stayed out all night on the pass I gave him yesterday," said the superintendent, after returning Bert's salute. "Perhaps you had better take a corporal with you, and look around and see if you can find any traces of him."

Bert was delighted. Here was an opportunity for him to win a reputation.

"Shall I go to Oxford, sir?" said he.

"To Oxford?" repeated the superintendent, while the officer of the day looked surprise.

"Yes, sir. There's where he has gone."

"How do you know?"

"His room-mate told me so. He has run away intending to go to sea."

"Well, well! It is more serious than I thought," said the superintendent, while an expression of annoyance and vexation settled on his face. "He must be brought back. Was he going to walk all that distance or steal a ride on the cars? He has no money, and his father took pains to tell me that none would be allowed him."

"He has plenty of it, sir," replied Bert. "He broke into Private Brigham's trunk and took a hundred dollars from it."

The superintendent could hardly believe that he had heard aright.

"That is the most disgraceful thing that ever happened in this school," said he, as soon as he could speak. "I didn't suppose there was a boy here who could be guilty of an act of that kind. Sergeant," he added, looking at his watch, "you have just fifteen minutes in which to reach the depot and ascertain whether or not Huggins took the eight o'clock train for Oxford last night. Learn all you can, and go with the squad which I shall at once send in pursuit of him."

"Very good, sir," replied Bert.

"Can I go?" asked Sergeant Elmer, as Bert ran into his room and snatched his overcoat and cap from their hooks.

"I hope so, but I am afraid not. The superintendent will make up the detail himself or appoint some shoulder-strap to do it, and it isn't likely that he will take two sergeants from the same company. You will have to act in my place while I am gone."

"Well, good-by and good luck to you," said the disappointed Elmer.

Bert hastened down the stairs and out of the building, and at the gate he found the officer of the day who had come there to pass him by the sentry. As soon as he had closed the gate behind him, he broke into a run, and in a few minutes more he was walking back and forth in front of the ticket-office, conversing with a quiet looking man who was to be found there whenever a train passed the depot. He was a detective.

"Good morning, Mr. Shepard," said Bert. "Were you on duty when No. 6 went down last night?"

No. 6 was the first southward bound train that passed through Bridgeport after Huggins left the academy grounds.

"I was," answered the detective. "Was that fellow I came pretty near running in last night on general principles one of your boys?"

"I can't tell until you describe him," said Bert.

"There was nothing wrong about his appearance, but I didn't like the way he acted," observed the detective. "He looked as though he had been up to something. He didn't buy a ticket, and he took pains to board the train from the opposite side. He wore a dark-blue overcoat, Arctic shoes, seal-skin cap, gloves and muffler, and had something on his upper lip that looked like a streak of free-soil, but which, perhaps, on closer examination might have proved to be a mustache."

"That's the fellow," said Bert. "Did he go toward Oxford?"

"He did. Do you want him? What has he been doing?"

"I do want him, for he is a deserter," replied Bert. He said nothing about the crime of which Huggins was guilty. The superintendent had not told him to keep silent in regard to it, but he knew he was expected to do it all the same.

"Then I am glad I didn't run him in," said Mr. Shepard. "You boys always see plenty of fun when you are out after deserters. But you can't take that big fellow alone. He'll pick you up and chuck you head first into a snow-drift."

"There are one or two fellows in that squad whom he can't chuck into a snow-drift," said Bert, pointing with his thumb over his shoulder toward the door.

The detective looked, and saw a party of students coming into the depot at double time. They were led by Captain (formerly Corporal) Mack, who, having been permitted to choose his own men, had detailed Curtis, Egan, Hopkins, and Don Gordon to form his squad. A long way behind them came the old German professor, Mr. Odenheimer, who was very red in the face and puffing and blowing like a porpoise. The fleet-footed boys had led him a lively race, and they meant to do it, too They didn't want him along, for his presence was calculated to rob them of much of the pleasure they would otherwise have enjoyed. He was jolly and good-natured when off duty, but still pompous and rather overbearing, and if Huggins were captured and Lester Brigham's money returned to him, the honor of the achievement would fall to him, and not to Captain Mack and his men.

"Young sheltemans," panted the professor, stopping in front of the squad which Captain Mack had halted and brought to a front preparatory to breaking ranks, "I use to could go double quick so good like de pest of you ven I vas in mine good Brussia fighting mit unser Fritz; but I peen not a good boy for running not now any more. Vere is Sergeant Gordon?"

"Here, sir," replied Bert, stepping up and saluting.

"Vell, vere ish dat young rascals—vat you call him—Hukkins?"

"He has gone to Oxford, sir," said Bert, who then went on to repeat the substance of his conversation with the detective. Now and then his eyes wandered toward the boys in the ranks, who came so near making him laugh in the professor's face that he was obliged to turn his back toward them. They were indulging in all sorts of pranks calculated to show their utter disapproval of the whole proceeding. Don was humped up like old Jordan, the negro he had so often personated; Hopkins was mimicking the professor; Egan, who had assumed a very wise expression of countenance, was checking off Bert's remarks on his fingers; Curtis was watching for a chance to snatch an apple from the stand behind him; while Captain Mack held himself in readiness to drop a piece of ice down his back the very moment he attempted it. These boys all liked the professor in spite of his pomposity and his constant allusions to his military record, but they would have been much better satisfied if he had remained at the academy. If they had taken time to consider the matter, they would have seen very clearly that the superintendent had acted for the best, and that he would not have showed any degree of prudence if he had left them to pursue and capture the deserter alone and unaided. There was no play about this, and besides Huggins was something worse than a deserter.

Just then the whistle of an approaching train was heard; whereupon Captain Mack was ordered to break ranks and procure tickets for himself and his party, Bert included. This done they boarded the cars, and in a few minutes more were speeding away toward Oxford.

"I don't at all like this way of doing business," observed Captain Mack, who occupied a seat with Bert. "I am not personally acquainted with Huggins, but if there is any faith to be put in his appearance, he is nobody's fool. He'll not go to Oxford after stealing that money. If he went this way, he will stop off at some little station, buy another suit of clothes and keep dark until he thinks the matter has had time to blow over."

"Perhaps you had better say as much to the professor," suggested Bert.

"Not I!" replied Captain Mack, with a laugh and a knowing shake of his head. "I have no desire to give him a chance to turn his battery of broken English loose on me. He has done it too many times already. While I am very anxious that Huggins should be caught and the money recovered, I can see as much fun in riding about the country as I can in drilling; and if the professor wants to spend a week or two on a wild-goose chase, it is nothing to me. I put in some good solid time with my books last vacation, and I am three months ahead of my class."

The captain was right when he said that Huggins did not look like anybody's fool, and he wasn't, either. When he first made up his mind to desert the academy, he laid his plans just as he told them to Lester Brigham; but one morning an incident occurred that caused him to make a slight change in them. He saw Lester go to his trunk and take a five-dollar bill from a well-filled pocket-book which he kept hidden under his clothing. The sight of it suggested an idea to Huggins—one that frightened him at first, but after he had pondered upon it for a while and dreamed about it a few times, it became familiar to him, and he ceased to look upon it as a crime.

"It is easier to ride than it is to walk," he often said to himself. "Lester doesn't need the money, and I do, for I don't know what I shall have to go through with before I can find a vessel. Oxford is a small place, and I may have to stay there a week or two before I can secure a berth, and how could I live all that time without money? I am not going to steal it—I shall borrow it, for, of course, my father will refund every cent of it. I know he will not like to do it, but he ought to have let me go to sea when I asked him."

After reasoning with himself in this way a few times, Huggins finally mustered up courage enough to make himself the possessor of the coveted pocket-book. Unfortunately, opportunities were not wanting. Lester was hardly ever in his room during the day-time, and it was an easy matter for Huggins to lock the door and break open the trunk with the aid of a spike he had picked up in the carpenter-shop. Then he bundled up some of his clothes, intending to ask for a pass and leave the academy at once. He got the pass, as we know, but found, to his great surprise and alarm, that he could not use it until after supper. It was no wonder that he showed nervousness and anxiety when Jones and the rest offered to lend him money to help him along. If he had not succeeded in satisfying them that he would not accept assistance from them, and Lester had gone to his trunk after the dollar, there would have been trouble directly. He escaped this danger, however, and as soon as he could use his pass, he made all haste to get out of Bridgeport.

"But I'll not go to Oxford yet," said he, when he found himself safe on board the cars. "The fellows said they wouldn't tell where I intended to go, but when they made that promise they didn't know that I had borrowed Brigham's money."

Just then the conductor tapped him on the shoulder and held out his hand for the boy's ticket.

"What is the fare to the next station?" asked the latter.

"One twenty-five," was the answer.

Huggins produced the money, and then buttoned his overcoat, settled back into an easy position on his seat, and tried to make up his mind what he should do next. Before he had come to any decision on this point, the whistle blew again, and the train came to a stop; whereupon Huggins picked up his bundle, which he had carried under his coat when he deserted the academy, and left the car. The few men he saw upon the platform were running about as if they were very busy—all except one, who strolled around with his hands in his pockets. Huggins drew back out of the glare of the lamps that were shining from the windows of the depot, to wait for an opportunity to speak to him. He had got off at a tank-station, but he did not find it out until it was too late to go farther.

Having taken on a fresh supply of coal and water the engine moved off, dragging its long train of sleeping-cars behind it, the station agent went into his office, closing the door behind him, and Huggins and the unemployed stranger were left alone on the platform.

"Good evening to you, pard," said the latter, walking up to the boy's place of concealment.

"How are you?" replied Huggins, who did not like the familiar tone in which he had been addressed. "Can you tell me which way to go to find a hotel?"

"Hotel!" repeated the stranger. "There's none around here."

Huggins started and looked about him. Then he saw that he had got off in the woods, and that there were only one or two small buildings within the range of his vision.

"Is there no house in the neighborhood at which I can obtain a night's lodging?" asked Huggins, growing alarmed.

"I don't suppose there is," was the encouraging reply.

"Where does the station-agent sleep?"

"In his office."

"How far is your house from here?"

"Well, I can't say just how many miles it is."

"What is your business," asked Huggins, growing suspicious of the stranger.

"I haven't any just now. I am a minister's son, traveling for my health. I'll tell you what we might do, pard: if you are a good talker you might coax the agent to let us spend the night in the waiting-room. There's a good fire there——"

Huggins waited to hear no more. The man was a professional tramp, there was no doubt about that, and the idea of passing the night in the same room with him was not to be entertained for a moment. He started for the office to have a talk with the agent, the tramp keeping close at his heels.

"I made a mistake in getting off here," said Huggins to the agent, "and I would be greatly obliged if you will direct me to some house where I can put up until morning."

"I should be glad to do it," was the answer, "but there is no one right around the depot who can accommodate you. There is a boarding-house for the mill-hands about a mile from here, but I couldn't direct you to it so that you could find it. The road runs through the woods, and you might miss it and get lost."

"Why, what in the world am I to do?" asked Huggins, who, having never been thrown upon his own resources before, was as helpless as a child would have been in the same situation. "Must I stay out doors all night?"

"Not necessarily. Where did you come from?"

"I came from Bridgeport and paid a dollar and twenty-five cents to go from there to the next station."

"Well, the next station is Carbondale, which is three miles from here. There is where you ought to have stopped."

"Could I hire a horse and cutter to take me there?"

"I don't think you could."

"I am able and willing to pay liberally for it."

"Oh, you would have to go out to the mills to find a horse and a man to drive it for you, and you might as well walk to Carbondale at once as to do that."

"When is the next train due?"

"The next train won't help you any, for it is the lightning express, and she doesn't stop here. You can't go on the next one either, for she is the fast freight, and doesn't carry passengers. You'll have to wait for the accommodation which goes through here at six fourteen in the morning."

"Then I suppose I shall have to pass the night in your waiting-room," said Huggins, who was fairly at his wits' end.

"Well, I suppose you won't," said the agent in emphatic tones. "I shall have to ask you to go out now, for I am going to lock up."

"Don't you leave a room open for the accommodation of passengers?" exclaimed Huggins, wondering what would become of him if the agent turned him out in the snow to pass the night as best he could, while the thermometer was only a degree or two above zero. If it had been summer he could have bunked under a tree; but as it was —the runaway shuddered when he thought of the long, cold hours that must be passed in some way before he would see the sun rise again. Here the tramp, who stood holding his hands over the stove, put in a word to help Huggins; but he only made a bad matter worse. The heart of the station agent was not likely to be moved to pity by any such advocate as he was. He carried a very hard-looking face, he was rough and unkempt, and his whole appearance was against him. Besides, he did not speak in a way calculated to carry his point.

"I don't see what harm it will do for us to sit by your fire," said he, in angry tones.

"I don't care whether you see any harm in it or not," said the agent, taking a bunch of keys from his pocket. "I know what my orders are, and I intend to obey them. Come now, move; both of you."

"I wish you would tell me what to do," said Huggins, as he turned toward the door. "I am not in this man's company, and neither am I interceding for him. I am speaking for myself alone."

"I can't help that. If I let you in I must let him in too; but my orders are to turn everybody out when I lock up. The best thing you can do is to strike out for Carbondale at your best pace. The night is clear, and you can't miss the way if you follow the railroad. There are no bridges or trestle-works for you to cross, and no cattle-guards to fall into. If you make haste, you can get there before the hotels shut up. Go on, now!"

The agent arose from his chair as he said this, and Huggins and the tramp opened the door and went out into the cold.

CHAPTER V.

DON'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE TRAMP.

"YOU'RE not in my company, ain't you? You didn't speak for me but for yourself, did you? You think you're too fine a gentleman to be seen loafing about with such a fellow as I am, don't you?" growled the tramp, when he and Huggins were alone on the platform. "I've the best notion in the world to make you pay for them words, and I will, too, if I find you hanging about here after the agent has gone to bed."

There was no doubt that the man was in earnest when he said this. The light from the agent's window shone full upon his face and the runaway could see that there was an evil look in it.

"If you had stood by me I would have given you a good place to sleep, for I know where there is a nice warm hay-mow with plenty of blankets and buffalo robes to put over you," continued the tramp. "I slept there last night, and I'm going there now, after I see you start for Carbondale. Go on, be off with you!"

"I'm not going there," replied Huggins, who was so badly frightened by the man's vehemence that he was afraid to show any of the indignation he felt at being ordered about in this unceremonious way. "I shall stay right here on this platform until daylight."

"No, you won't. I'm not going to have you staying around here watching for a chance to follow me to my warm bed. You went back on me, and now you can look out for yourself."

"I have no intention of following you," said Huggins.

"I'll believe that when I see you dig out for Carbondale. Go on, I say, or I'll help you!"

The man took his hands out of his pockets, and Huggins believing that he was about to put his threat into execution, jumped off the platform, and started up the railroad track at a rapid pace, the tramp standing in the full glare of the light from the agent's window, and keeping a close watch over his movements.

"That was a pretty good idea," said he to himself, as he saw the boy's figure growing dim in the distance. "He said he was able and willing to pay liberal for somebody to take him to Carbondale, and that proves that he's got money. I'll just look into that matter when he gets a little farther away. I'll take that fine cap, muffler, and them gloves of his'n, too. They'll keep me warm while I have 'em, and I can trade 'em off or sell 'em before the police can get wind of me."

So saying the man stepped down from the platform and moved leisurely up the track in the direction in which Huggins had disappeared, shuffling along in a supremely lazy and disjointed way, that no one ever saw imitated by anybody except a professional tramp.

"The insolent fellow!" thought Huggins, looking back now and then to make sure that the man was still standing on the platform. "What right had he to tell me to go on to Carbondale if I wanted to stay at the depot until morning? He must think I am hard up for a night's rest if he imagines that I would be willing to sleep in a haymow. I'll have a good bed while I am about it, for now that I am on the road to Carbondale, I shall keep moving until I get there. How lonely and still it is out here, and how gloomy the woods look! I wish I had somebody to talk to."

When the darkness had shut the station-house, the tank, the upright, motionless figure of the tramp and every thing else except the light in the agent's window out from his view, Huggins broke into a run, and flew along the track at the top of his speed. He kept up the pace as long as he could stand it, and then settled down into a rapid trot which carried him easily over one of the three miles he had to cover before he could find a roof to shelter him and a bed to sleep in.

"I think I am all right now," soliloquized the runaway, slackening his pace to a walk and unbuttoning his heavy muffler, which felt too warm about his neck. "I tell you I am glad to see the last of that tramp, for I didn't at all like the looks of him. I believe he'd just as soon——"

The runaway's heart seemed to stop beating. He faced quickly about, and there was the tramp whom he hoped he had seen for the last time, close behind him. He had easily kept pace with the boy, stepping so exactly in time with him that the sound of his feet upon the frosty snow had not betrayed his presence. He held some object

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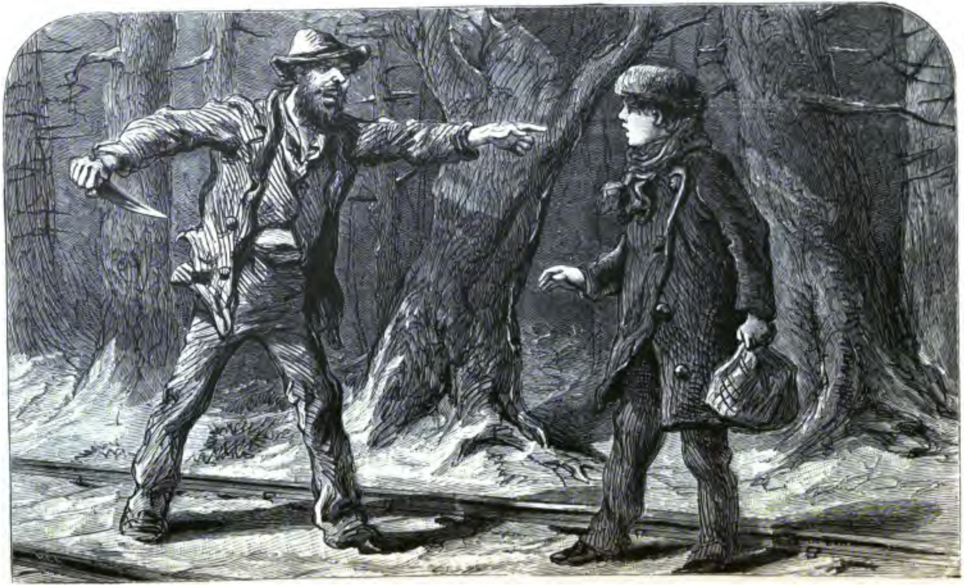

Huggins Robbed by the Tramp.

in his hand which he flourished over his head, and Huggins, believing it to be a pistol, stood trembling in his tracks and waited for him to come up. The object was not a pistol, but it was a murderous looking knife, which made the boy shudder all over as he looked at it.

"I've concluded to make you pay for going back on me so fair and square while you were talking to the agent," were the tramp's next words. "Put your hands above your head while I go through your pockets and see what you've got in 'em."

"Do you want my money?" asked Huggins, who could hardly make himself understood, so frightened was he. "If you do I will give it to you, but don't hurt me."

He carried his money in two places. The greater portion of it was in Lester Brigham's pocket-book; and in one of his vest pockets he had the small amount of change the conductor gave him when he paid his fare. As it was all in small bills and made a roll of respectable size, he hoped he could satisfy the robber by handing it over, but he was doomed to be disappointed. When he made a move as if he were about to unbutton his overcoat, the man raised his knife threateningly.

"None o' that!" said he, in savage tones. "You can't draw a barker on me while I am within reach of you, and it will be worse for you if you try it. Put your hands above your head, and be quick about it."

Huggins was afraid to refuse or to utter a word of remonstrance. He raised his hands in the air, and the robber, after dropping the knife into his coat-pocket, so that it could be readily seized if circumstances should seem to require it, proceeded to "go through" him in the most business-like way. He turned all the boy's pockets inside out, and when he had completed his investigations, Huggins's money was all gone and he stood shivering in the tramp's hat and thread-bare coat, while the tramp himself looked like another person. He had appropriated the runaway's cap, coats, muffler and gloves, and would have taken his boots and Arctics too, if they had been big enough for him.

"Now, then," said he, as he buttoned the muffler about his neck and drew on the gloves, "I believe I am done with you, and you can dig out."

"But where can I go?" cried Huggins. "I have no money to pay for a night's lodging, and I am almost a thousand miles from home."

"You are better off than I am, for I have no home at all," answered the tramp. "It won't hurt you to sleep out of doors; I've done it many a time. Now skip, for I have wasted words enough with you. Not that way," he added, as Huggins reluctantly turned his face toward Carbondale. "Go back to the station. Step lively now, for if you don't, I shall be after you."

The boy dared not wait for the command to be repeated, believing, as he did, that it would be emphasized by a prod with the knife which the robber still held in his hand. Scarcely realizing what he was doing he hurried along the track toward the station, and when he ventured to look behind him, the tramp was nowhere in sight.

"Now what am I going to do?" said Huggins to himself; and it was a question he pondered all the way to the station, and which he could not answer even when daylight came. The station-agent was just locking up as he stepped upon the platform, and he resolved to make another effort to obtain a seat by one of his fires.

"Won't you please let me sit in the waiting-room until morning?" said the boy, in a pleading voice.

"No, *no!*" was the angry response. "Clear out! You are the third one who has asked me that question to-night. I don't keep a hotel. If I did, I'd have a sign out."

"That man who followed me into your office a little while ago, has robbed me," gasped Huggins, choking back a sob.

"Well, I should say he had!" exclaimed the agent, after he had taken a sharp look at Huggins. "I thought I knew your voice, but I didn't recognize you in those clothes. If I had had the chance I should have told you to shake him as soon as possible. He has been hanging around here all day, and I was afraid he would be up to something before he left. Why didn't you call for help?"

"He was armed and savage and I was afraid to say a word," replied the runaway. "Besides it would have done no good, for I was a long distance up the track when he overtook me."

"Did he take all your money?"

"Every red cent. He didn't even leave me my pocket-knife or note-book."

"Your case is a hard one, that's a fact, and I will do what I can for you," said the agent. "You may sit in this room to-night. That fellow will probably go to Oxford, and if I can get the operator there to respond to my call, I'll tell him to put the police on the lookout. To-morrow I will send an alarm all along the line."

"I am much obliged to you," said Huggins, gratefully. "I may some day be able to repay you for your kindness."

"That's all right. Good night."

The agent went out, and the runaway drew one of the chairs up in front of the stove and sat down in it. He was provided for for the night, but what should he do when morning came? Should he stay there at the tank-station and look for work, or would it be better for him to start for Oxford on foot, begging his meals as he went like any other tramp? That was what he intended to do when he first made up his mind to desert the academy, and he could not see that there was any other course open to him now. While he was thinking about it, he fell asleep. He did not know when the lightning express and the fast freight went through, but he heard the whistle of the morning train, and hurried to the door to see the accommodation approaching. He saw something else, too—something that put life and energy into him, and sent him around the corner of the building out of sight.

"They are after me already," said he, as he hurried along a road that led from the station into the woods. "I saw their uniform caps sticking out of the window."

If he had waited a few minutes longer he would have seen Captain Mack and Sergeant Gordon step upon the platform and run toward the agent's office.

"Did you say he was a tall young fellow with a little mustache, and that he wore a dark-blue overcoat, Arctic shoes and seal-skin furs? He's the very chap. Come with me. He was fast asleep in a chair in the waiting-room not more than half an hour ago. There is his chair," said the agent, as he opened the door, "but he has skipped out, as sure as the world."

"Have you any idea where he is?" asked the young captain.

"I think he must have gone to Carbondale," replied the agent. "But see here, boys: you needn't waste any time in looking for a fellow in a blue overcoat and seal-skin furs, for the police will take care of him. You want to keep your eyes open for a chap in a patched and torn broadcloth coat and a slouch hat without any brim to it. You see——"

Here the agent went on to tell how Huggins had been robbed and compelled to exchange clothes with the tramp. The boys listened attentively, and when the agent finished his story, they hastened back to the train to report to the professor. Captain Mack did the talking, and wound up with the request that he might be permitted to take a couple of men and go up the wagon-road toward Carbondale to see if Huggins had gone that way. To his great surprise as well as delight the request was granted, the professor adding that he and the rest of the squad would keep on with the train until he thought they had got ahead of the runaway, and then they would get off and come back on foot.

"If you seen any dings of Hukkins or de veller vot robbed him, you will gatch all two of dem and rebort to me py delegraph," said the professor, in concluding his instructions. "I shall pe somveres along de road, and as lightning can dravel so much fasder dan shteam, you can easy gatch me."

"Very good, sir. I wish I could take you with me, Bert," he added, in a whisper, "for I am bound to carry off the honors of this scout; but you will have to stay and act as lackey to the professor. Gordon, you and Egan come with me."

The boys obeyed with alacrity, smiling and kissing their hands to Hopkins and Curtis, who frowned fiercely and shook their fists at them in return. They stood upon the platform until the train moved off, and then Captain Mack said:

"Business before pleasure, boys. I move that we go somewhere and get a good, old-fashioned country breakfast. I speak for a big bowl of bread and milk."

The others were only too glad to fall in with this proposition. Having left the academy almost as soon as they got up, they began to feel the cravings of hunger, and their appetites were sharpened by the mere mention of bread and milk. They held a short consultation with the station-agent, and then started leisurely down the wagon road in the direction of Carbondale, stopping at every house along the route with the intention of asking for a bowl of bread and milk, but always, for some reason or other, coming away without doing it. They were not inclined to be fastidious. When it came to the pinch they could eat pancakes or bacon that were seasoned with nothing but ashes and cinders with as much zest as anybody; but they had become so accustomed to the strict and rigidly enforced rules regarding personal cleanliness, that any violation of these rules shocked them. To quote from Don Gordon, who generally expressed his sentiments in the plainest possible language, they had no use for children whose faces and hands were covered with molasses, nor could they see anything to admire in an unkempt woman who went about her cooking with a well-blackened clay-pipe in her mouth.

"There's the place we are looking for," said Egan, directing his companions' attention to a neat little farm-house a short distance in advance of them. "If we can't find a breakfast there, we'll not find it this side of——"

At that instant the front door of the house was suddenly opened, and a lady appeared upon the threshold. She looked anxiously up and down the road, and, seeing the students approaching, beckoned to them with frantic eagerness, at the

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same time calling out, "Help! help!" at the top of her voice.

"Come on, boys," cried Captain Mack. "Her house is on fire."

The officer and his men broke into a run, discarding their heavy overcoats as they went, but before they had made many steps they discovered that it was something besides fire that had occasioned the lady's alarm. All on a sudden a back door was jerked violently open, and a man bounded down the steps and ran across a field toward the railroad track.

"He's been doing something in there," shouted Captain Mack. "Take after him, boys."

"That's one of the fellows we want," observed Egan. "He's got Huggins's overcoat on."

"So he has," said the captain. "Never mind the lady, for she is safe now. Catch the tramp, and we'll find out what he had been doing to frighten her."

Don Gordon, who had already taken the lead of his companions, cleared the high farm gate as easily as though he had been furnished with wings, and ran up the carriage-way. He lingered at a wood-rack he found in front of the barn long enough to jerk one of the stakes out of it, and having thus provided himself with a weapon, he continued the pursuit.

The tramp, who had about fifty yards the start, proved himself to be no mean runner. His wind was good, his muscles had been hardened by many a long pedestrian tour about the country, and Don afterward admitted that for a long time it looked as if the man were going to beat him; but when the latter got what school-boys are wont to call his "second wind," he gained rapidly. Another hundred yards run brought him almost within striking distance of the fugitive, and while he was trying to make up his mind whether he ought to halt him or knock him down without ceremony to pay him for frightening the lady, the tramp suddenly stopped and faced about. Then Don saw that he carried a knife in his hand.

"Keep away from me," said he, in savage tones, "or I'll——"

"You'll what?" demanded Don, leaning on his club and casting a quick glance over his shoulder to see how far his companions were behind.

"Do you see this?" said the tramp, shaking the knife threateningly.

"Yes, I see it," answered Don, coolly. "You had better throw it away. You might hurt yourself with it."

The tramp was astonished. Here was a boy who could not be as easily frightened as Huggins was, and he began to stand in awe of him. He was old enough to know that a cool, deliberate antagonist is much more to be feared than one who allows himself to go into a paroxysm of rage and excitement.

"Drop that knife," commanded Don, who had suddenly made up his mind that the tramp ought to be disarmed before his companions came up; and as he spoke, he raised his club over his head.

A year's hard drill, added to faithful attention to the instructions he had received from Professor Odenheimer, had made Don Gordon very proficient in the broadsword exercise, but he had never had an opportunity to test the value of the accomplishment until this particular morning. Seeing that the man had no intention of dropping the knife he proceeded to disarm him, and he did it in a way that was as surprising to him as it was to the tramp. Bringing his club to the first position, he made a feint with it as if he were going to give a No. 1 cut. If the weapon had not been arrested in its progress through the air, and the tramp had stood motionless, he would have received a sounding whack on his left cheek; but seeing the club coming he ducked his head at the very instant that Don changed from the first to the third cut, thus receiving squarely between the eyes the full force of a terrific blow that was intended for his right forearm. He fell as if he had been shot. The knife fell from his grasp, and before he could recover it, Captain Mack had run up and secured possession of it.

Without saying a word Egan proceeded to explore the tramp's pockets, and the first thing he brought to light was Lester Brigham's money. It was all there, too, for the tramp had had no opportunity to spend any of it. He had reasons of his own for desiring to go to Oxford, but he did not intend to start immediately. He slept in a barn that night, and intended, as soon as he had begged a breakfast, to strike back into the country and make his way to Oxford by a round-about course, avoiding the railroad and all the villages along the route. He hoped in this way to elude the police who, he knew, would be on the watch for him. When he reached the farm-house from which he had taken his hurried flight, and found that the male members of the family were absent, he began to act as though he had a right there. He demanded a warm breakfast and a seat at the table; and when the lady of the house objected and tried to oppose his entrance into the kitchen, he frightened her nearly out of her senses by producing his knife and threatening to do something terrible with it if his demands were not complied with on the instant. Some of these things Captain Mack and his men learned from the tramp himself, and the rest of the story they heard from the lady, into whose presence they conducted their prisoner without loss of time. The latter came very near meeting with a warm reception. The farmer and his two stalwart sons had just come in from the wood-lot where they had spent the morning in chopping, and it was all the old gentleman, aided by his wife and Captain Mack and his men, could do to keep the boys from punching the tramp's head.

"What are you going to do with him?" demanded the farmer, when quiet had been restored and Captain Mack had told what the tramp had done to Huggins the night before.

"I am going to take him back to the station and telegraph to Professor Odenheimer for orders," answered the captain. "Those are my instructions."

"Haven't had any breakfast, I reckon, have you? I thought not. Well, I haven't either. Come in and sit down. It's all ready."

"Thank you," said Mack. "A bowl of milk would be——"

"Oh, we've got something better than that."

"You haven't anything that would suit me better," said Mack, with refreshing candor. "I am a city boy."

"Oh, ah! Well, you shall have all the milk you can drink."

When Captain Mack and his men had satisfied their appetites and listened to the grateful words of the farmer, who thanked them for their prompt response to his wife's appeals for assistance, they put on their overcoats, which one of the boys had brought in from the road during their absence, and set out for the station with their prisoner. The latter's face began to show the effect of Don's blow, but the tramp did not seem to mind it. He ate the cold bread and meat which the farmer's wife gave him just as he was about to leave the house with his captors, and even joined in their conversation.

When the students reached the depot they were met by the agent, who laughed all over when he saw the tramp, and drew Captain Mack off on one side.

"You got him, didn't you?" said he. "Some of you must have given him a good pounding, judging by his countenance. Now, if you are at all sharp, you can capture the other."

"Who? Huggins?"

"Yes. He went out to the mill and got a job there at hauling wood. He was in here not ten minutes ago, and I had a long talk with him. He saw some of you looking out of the window when the accommodation came in, and that was the reason he took himself off in such a hurry. I told him that you had gone on toward Oxford. He'll be back here with another load in less than an hour, and then you can catch him."

"I am much obliged to you," said Captain Mack. "Now will you see if you can ascertain where the professor and the rest of the boys are?"

The agent said he would; but his efforts to find them met with no success. The operators of whom he made inquiries had all seen them, but couldn't tell where they were.

"They haven't left the train yet," said he. "The accommodation will be at Munson in a quarter of an hour, and then I will try again."

Of course the captain could not make his report until he knew where the professor was, so he and his men went into the waiting-room, accompanied by the tramp, and sat down there—all except Don Gordon, who was ordered to hold himself in readiness to capture the deserter when he came back with the next load of wood.

CHAPTER VI.

ABOUT VARIOUS THINGS.

DON'S first care was to ascertain which way Huggins would come from when he returned from the mill with his wood, and his second to keep behind the depot out of sight. He paced up and down the platform in front of the door of the waiting-room, so that he could be at hand to lend assistance in case the tramp showed a disposition to make trouble for Mack and Egan, but that worthy had no more fight in him. He was a coward and afraid of Don, and he wisely concluded that the best thing he could do was to keep quiet.

At the end of twenty minutes the station-agent came in. He had heard from the professor and the rest of the squad, who had left the train at Munson. At Captain Mack's request he sent off the following despatch:

"Have captured the tramp who robbed Huggins, and expect to have Huggins himself inside of an hour."

In due time the answer came back:

"Remain at the station until I come."

"And when he comes, which will be about four o'clock this afternoon, we shall have to go back to our books and duties," said the young officer, stretching his arms and yawning. "I haven't seen a bit of fun during this scout, have you, Egan? I hope the next fellow who makes up his mind to desert the academy, will lead us a good long chase and give us some work to do."

The captain had his wish. The next time he was sent in pursuit of a runaway, he did not come back in one day nor two; and even at the end of a week he had not completed his work. We shall tell all about it presently.

The minutes wore away, and presently Don Gordon, who stood where he could command a view of the road for a long distance, saw a load of wood coming out of the timber. There was somebody walking beside it and driving the horses, but Don would not have known it was Huggins had not the station-agent, who was also on the watch, at that moment opened his door and called out:

"There he is."

"Much obliged," replied Don, who straightway pulled off his overcoat and dropped it upon the platform. He knew nothing whatever of Huggins. The latter might be a good runner or a good fighter, and if he concluded to make a race of it or to resist arrest, Don intended to be ready for him.

Huggins approached the depot with fear and trembling. He stopped very frequently to reconnoiter the building and its surroundings, and when he drew up to the wood-pile, he threw the blankets over his steaming horses, and jumped upon the platform. He wanted to make sure that the coast was clear before he began throwing off his load. Don could not see him now, but the sound of his footsteps told him that the deserter was approaching his place of concealment. When he came around the corner of the building, Don stepped into view and greeted him with the greatest cordiality.

"Your name is Huggins, I believe," said he; and without giving the runaway time to recover from his surprise and bewilderment, Don took him by the arm and led him toward the door of the waiting-room. "I am glad to see you," he continued, "and you will be glad to know that the tramp who robbed you last night has surrendered Lester Brigham's money, and that your clothes—— Hallo! What's the matter?"

Huggins had been brought to his senses by Don's words. He saw that he had run right into a trap that had been prepared for him, and he made a desperate attempt to escape. Throwing all his strength, which was by no means insignificant, into the effort, he tried to wrench his arm loose from Don's grasp, and to trip him up at the same time; but the vicious kick he aimed at Don's leg expended its force in the empty air, and Huggins turned part way around and sat down on the platform very suddenly.

"What are you doing down there?" said Don, taking the runaway by the collar and lifting him to his feet. "Come into the waiting-room if you want to sit down. I was about to say, when you interrupted me, that you can get your clothes back now. Mack's got the money, and all your property. Here we are. Walk right in and make yourself at home."

Captain Mack and Egan, who had kept a watchful eye on Don and his captive, but who dared not go out to assist him for fear that the tramp would improve the opportunity to escape, opened the door of the waiting-room, and Huggins walked in without saying a word. In obedience to Captain Mack's command an exchange of hats and coats was made between the new prisoner and the man who had robbed him, and after that another despatch was sent to Professor Odenheimer. The answer that came back was the same as the first.

The fun, as well as the work, was all over now, and the students had nothing to do but walk about the room and wait as patiently as they could for the train that was to take them back to Bridgeport. It came at last, and in due time the tramp was handed over to the authorities to be tried for highway robbery, while Huggins was marched to his room to be kept there under guard until his father came to take him away. He was expelled from the school in general orders. Lester Brigham was punished for keeping so large an amount of money by him in violation of the regulations, and Don Gordon was looked upon as a hero. This hurt Lester more than anything else. He had come there with the fixed determination to supplant Don and Bert in the estimation of both teachers and students—to build himself up by pulling them down—and he was not a little disappointed as well as enraged, when he discovered that it was not in his power to work them any injury. He wrote a doleful letter to his father, complaining of the indignities that were constantly heaped upon him, and begging to be allowed to go home; but for once in his life Mr. Brigham was firm, and Lester was given to understand that he must make up his mind to stay at Bridgeport until the four years' course was completed.

"I'll show him whether I will or not," said Lester, who was almost beside himself with fury. "He'll *have* to let me go home. If Jones and the rest will stand by me, I will kick up a row here that will be talked of as long as the academy stands. I'll show the fellows that Don Gordon isn't the only boy in the world who has any pluck."

In process of time Mr. Huggins came to the academy to look into the charges that had been made against his son, and when he went away, the deserter went with him. It was a long time before the boys knew what had become of him, for he left not a single friend at the academy, and there was no one who corresponded with him.

Things went smoothly after that. Of course there was some grand running, and a good deal of extra sentry and police duty to be performed by the idle and disobedient ones; but there were no flagrant violations of the rules—no more thefts or desertions. The malcontents were plucky enough to do almost anything, but they lacked a leader. There were no Don Gordons or Tom Fishers or Clarence Duncans among them. They had expected great things of Lester Brigham, but when they became better acquainted with him, they found that he was a boy of no spirit whatever. He talked loudly and spent his money freely, and his liberality brought him plenty of followers who were quick to discover all the weak points in his character. His insufferable vanity and self-conceit, his hatred of Don Gordon, his fondness for telling of the imaginary exploits he had performed both afloat and ashore—all these were seized upon by a certain class of boys who flattered him to his face, ate unlimited quantities of pancakes and pies at his expense and laughed at him behind his back. But the idea he had suggested to them—that of stealing a yacht and going off somewhere and having a picnic—was not forgotten. They talked about it at every opportunity; numerous plans for their amusement were proposed and discussed, and they had even selected the yacht in which they intended to make their cruise. Lester was, of course, the nominal leader, but Jones and Enoch Williams did all the work and laid all the plans.

The winter months passed quietly away, spring with its trout-fishing and pickerel-spearing came and went, and summer was upon them almost before they knew it. Now the students went to work in earnest, for the season of the annual camp and the examination that followed it, was close at hand. Even the lazy boys began to show some signs of life now, for they had heard much of the pleasures that were to be enjoyed during their month under canvas, and they were as anxious as the others to make a good showing in the presence of the strangers and friends who would be sure to visit them.

Lester Brigham would have looked forward to the camping frolic with the greatest eagerness and impatience if he had only had a corporal's *chevrons* to wear; but he hadn't, and if we might judge by his standing in his class, he was not likely to wear them, either.

"I'll have to stand guard and be bossed around by that little whiffet of a Bert Gordon, who will throw on more airs than he deserves," Lester often said to himself. "But I'll not go to camp, if I can help it. If I do, I'll not stay there long, for I will do something that will send me back to the academy under arrest."

This was a part of Jones's programme. The boys who were to steal the yacht and go to sea in her—there were twenty-eight of them in all—were to fall so far behind their classes that they would be ordered to remain at the academy to make up for lost time. If they did not succeed in accomplishing their object and were sent to camp against their will, they were to commit some offence that would cause them to be marched back under arrest. The boys growled lustily when this programme was marked out for them, and some of them flatly refused to follow it..

"As this is my first year at the academy I have never been in camp, and I should like to see what they do there," said one. "Suppose those Mount

Pleasant Indians should come in again? I shouldn't like to miss that."

"I don't see any sense in waiting so long," said another. "Why can't we go now?"

"Where's the yacht?" asked Jones, in reply. "There isn't one in the harbor. They have all gone off on a cruise. The first thing is to make sure that we can get a boat. As soon as that matter is settled, I will tell you what to do next. If you will hold yourselves in readiness to move when I say the word, I will guarantee that we will see more fun than those who stay in camp."

"What will they do with us after they capture us?"

"They will court-martial and expel the last one of us. That's a foregone conclusion. If there are any among us who desire to stay in this school, they had better back down at once, so that we may know who they are. But we'll lead them a lively race before we are caught; you may depend upon that."

Whenever Jones talked in this way there were a few of his adherents—and they were the ones who had exhibited the most enthusiasm when Lester's plan was first proposed—who felt their courage oozing out at the end of their fingers. It was easy enough to talk about capturing and running off with a private yacht, but as the time for action drew nearer they began to show signs of wavering. Unfortunately, however, an incident happened during the latter part of June, which did more to unite them, and to bring their runaway scheme to a head, than almost anything else could have done.

Among those who kept a watchful eye over the interests of the academy, and who took the greatest pride in its success, were the rank and file of the 61st regiment of infantry, National Guards, which was located at Hamilton, a thriving little city about fifty miles north of Bridgeport. This regiment was composed almost entirely of veterans, and a few of them were the fathers, uncles and older brothers of some of the boys who were now wearing the academy uniform. Their colonel and some of their field and line officers were graduated there, and in the ranks were many bearded fellows who, in the days gone by, had run the guards to eat pancakes at Cony Ryan's, and who had paid for their fun by spending the next Saturday afternoon in walking extras with muskets on their shoulders and packed knapsacks on their backs.

The regiment had once spent a week in camp with the academy boys, and this year was the twenty-fifth anniversary of its organization. The members intended to celebrate it by giving the citizens of Hamilton the finest parade they had witnessed for many a day. Regiments from Rhode Island, New York and Ohio had given favorable replies to the invitations that had been sent to them, others from Virginia and North Carolina, which had seen service under General Lee at Richmond, had promised to be present, the firemen and civic societies were to join in the parade, and the academy boys were expected to be there in full force. The line was to be formed after dinner had been served in a big tent, and the festivities were to conclude with a grand ball in the evening.

When the superintendent read the invitation before the school and asked the students what they thought about it, they arose as one boy and raised such a tumult of "Union cheers" and "rebel yells" (remember there were a good many Southern boys among them), that the superintendent, after trying in vain to make his signal bell heard, raised his hand to enforce silence.

"Young gentlemen, you know that such a demonstration as this is a direct violation of our rules and regulations," said he, when the boys had resumed their seats; but still he did not seem to be very much annoyed. He judged that they were unanimously in favor of accepting the invitation, and the adjutant would be instructed to reply accordingly. He hoped that every member of the academy would be able to join in the parade, *but* there were two things that must be distinctly understood: The first was, that they could not remain to take part in the festivities of the evening—they must start for home at six o'clock. The boys, he said, had all they could do to prepare themselves for the examination, and pleasure must not be allowed to interfere with business. If they deserved it they would have plenty of recreation when they went into camp. Just then a boy in the back part of the room raised his hand. The superintendent nodded to him, and the boy arose and said:

"Could we not march to and from the city, camping out on the way, instead of going by rail?"

The flutter of excitement which this proposition caused in every part of the school-room indicated that the students were all in favor of it; but it seems that the superintendent wasn't. There would be no objection, he said, if the parade were to come off immediately; but the 24th of July was the day that had been set for the celebration; it would take three days to march there, as many more to return, and seven days of study taken from the end of the term would certainly show in the examination. They were too valuable to be wasted. One day was all he could allow them.

The second thing he wished them to understand was this: The parade would be an event of some consequence. It would afford them as much pleasure as the fight with the Mount Pleasant Indians. They would be surrounded by well-drilled men who would watch all their movements with critical eyes, and note and comment upon their slightest errors or indiscretions. He had no fears for the majority of the students, for he knew beforehand that they would act like soldiers while they were in the ranks, and like young gentlemen when they were out of them; but there were some among them, he was sorry to say, whose presence would reflect no honor upon their companies—boys who could not keep their eyes directed to the front while they were marching, or hold their heads still on dress-parade, and whose conduct, when they were on the streets and out of sight of their teachers and officers, would not be calculated to win the respect of the citizens of Hamilton. He did not want those boys to accompany them, but still he would give them the same chance he gave the others.

They had nearly five weeks of hard study and drill before them, during which time it was possible for any studious and attentive boy to run his standing up to a hundred. Those who did that, might be sure of a holiday and a general good time on the 24th of July; but those who allowed themselves to fall below seventy-five, would be required to remain at the academy. He left the matter in their own hands.

"I say, Don," whispered Egan, as the students marched out of the school-room, "if this thing had happened last year, you and I would have gone to the hop, wouldn't we?"

"I believe we would," answered Don.

"Well, what do you say to——"

"I'll not do it," was the emphatic response. "If any of the other fellows have a mind to desert and stay to the roll, they may do it and take the consequences; but I won't. I haven't received a single reprimand this term, not even from that old martinet Odenheimer, and what's more, I don't intend to put myself in the way of getting one."

"Good for you, Gordon," said Egan, approvingly. "Stick to it, and the day that sees you a first-class cadet, will see you lieutenant-colonel of the academy battalion. You hear me?"

"I hope it will," replied Don. "It certainly will not see me a private; you may depend upon that."

That night Lester Brigham and his friend Jones met in the gymnasium. Their followers came up, one after the other, and in a few minutes there was quite a crowd of boys gathered about them. Some of them spoke with great enthusiasm regarding the proposed excursion to Hamilton, while others were sullen, and had but little to say. Among the latter was Lester Brigham, who, having wasted his time and fallen behind his class in everything, saw very plainly that his chances for participating in the celebration were slim indeed. He grew angry whenever he thought that he would have to remain a prisoner at the academy while the other boys in his company were seeing no end of fun, and when he got that way, he was ready for almost anything. He saw how his enforced sojourn at Bridgeport could be turned to account; but the next thing was to make the rest of the fellows see it.

"Things couldn't have been planned to suit us better, could they?" said Lester, as the boys crowded about him.

"They might have been planned to suit *me* better—a good deal better," growled one, in reply. "I wish that invitation had been sent a month ago. Then I should have gone to work in earnest, and perhaps I would stand some chance of going to Hamilton with my company."

"Why, do you want to go?" exclaimed Lester.

"Of course I do, and I will, too, if there is anything to be gained by faithful effort. If you catch me in any mischief before the result of the next five weeks' study is announced, you may shoot me."

"And me; and me," chorused several of the boys.

"Look here, Brigham," said Jones. "That celebration will be the grandest thing you ever saw, outside of a big city, and we mustn't miss it."

"I was going to suggest that it would be a good time to start off on our cruise," said Lester. "The boys who will be left here to stand guard will be fellows after our own hearts, and we can easily induce them to pass us or to join in with us."

"That's my idea," said another.

"Well, it isn't mine," said Jones, in very decided tones.

"Don't you know what the understanding was?" began Lester.

"I know all about it," replied Jones. "I ought to, for I proposed it. The bargain was, that we were to be left out of camp, if we could, so that we could desert the academy when it was not strongly guarded. Failing that, we were to leave the camp in a body, capture our boat and go to sea in her. Wasn't that the agreement, boys?"

The students all said it was.

"I am ready to live up to that agreement," continued Jones; "but I wouldn't miss that parade for any money. I am going to the ball in the evening, too."

"You can't," said Lester. "The superintendent said you would come home on the six o'clock train."

"Some will and some won't," said a boy who had not spoken before. "It will be an easy matter for those of us who want to stay, to slip away and hide until the rest of the boys are gone. If I go to Hamilton I shall go to the dance."

"And I'll stay here," said Lester, who was disappointed as well as enraged. "But when you return, you will not find me. I am going off on a cruise if I have to steal a skiff and go alone."

"You needn't go alone," said one of the boys. "I will go with you."

"Wait until August and we will all go with you," said Jones.

"I can't and I shan't. I have waited long enough already. I have seen quite enough of this school."

These were the sentiments of a good many of the students, who gradually drew over to Lester's side, and when the latter had run his eye over them, he found that there were an even dozen who were willing to stand by him.

"Whose side are you on, Enoch?" inquired Lester.

He waited with considerable anxiety for the reply, for he knew that a good deal depended upon Enoch Williams. He was to be first officer of the yacht, when they got her (the real commander, in fact, for Lester, who was to be the captain, didn't know the starboard rail from the main truck) and if Lester could induce him to come over to his side, the rest of the boys would probably come with him.

"I go with the majority," answered Enoch. "The most of the fellows have declared against your plan, and if they are going to the celebration, I am going too."

"By dividing in this way, you act as if you desire to read us out of your good books," said Jones. "If that is the case, all right. If you will keep still about us and our plans, we will not blow on you. If you succeed in reaching the bay, and in eluding the tugs that are sent after you, we may join you some time during the second week in August, if you will tell us where you are going."

"They are a pack of cowards," observed Lester, as Jones and Williams walked away, followed by their friends. "You fellows did well to side with me. They had no intention of helping us capture that yacht, and this is the way they take to get out of it."

"I don't know whether we have done well or not," said one of Lester's friends, when he saw the others moving away. "Now that Enoch has deserted us, who is there to command the boat?"

"Why, I am to have charge of her," said Lester, with a look of surprise. "That was understood from the very first."

"But you are a fresh-water sailor and don't know anything about the coast," said the boy.

"I know I don't, and neither does Enoch. But I never yet got a vessel into a place that I couldn't get her out of, and if you will trust to me I will look out for your safety and insure you lots of fun besides," said Lester, confidently; and then he wondered what he should do if the boys took him at his word.

"I must see if I can't induce Enoch to stand by me," said he to himself. "If he refuses, the whole thing is up stump, for I can't command the yacht, and I am not foolish enough to try it. I will wait a few days, and perhaps something will turn up in my favor."

Lester was not disappointed. When each scholar's standing for the week was announced on Friday night, Jones had only fifty marks to his credit, while Enoch Williams was obliged to be satisfied with thirty.

"I've done my level best," said the former, in a discouraged tone, "and now I believe I'll give it up."

"Never say die," said Enoch, hopefully. "I have better reason for being discouraged than you have. I shall try harder than ever from this time on, and if I can get up as high as ninety next week, and stay there, that will make my average standing seventy-eight. You *must* try, old boy, for I don't want to go to Hamilton unless you do. Give me your promise."

Jones gave it, but said he didn't think anything would come of it.

CHAPTER VII.

A TEST OF COURAGE.

IT was by no means a common occurrence for the best of the scholars to win a hundred credit marks in a week, for in order to do it, it was necessary that they should be perfect in everything. If their standing and deportment as students were all they desired them to be, they ran the risk of falling behind in their record as soldiers. If they handled their muskets a little too quickly or too slowly while their company was going through the manual of arms, if they forgot that the guide was left when marching in platoon front, and allowed themselves to fall half an inch out of line, or if they turned their heads on dress-parade to watch the band while it "rounded off," they were sure to be reported and to lose some of their hard-earned credit marks.

Don Gordon worked early and late, and his average for the first three weeks was ninety—Bert following close behind with eighty-eight. Jones and Enoch Williams did not do as well, and Lester was out of the race almost before it was begun. Enoch made a gallant struggle, and would have succeeded in winning the required number of marks if Jones had only let him alone; but at the end of the third week the latter gave up trying.

"Its no use, Williams," said he. "I've made a bad showing, thanks to the partiality of the instructors, who don't intend to let a fellow win on his merits. I have made just a hundred and forty altogether, and if I could make a clean score during the next two weeks, my average would be sixty-eight—seven points too low. Now what are you going to do?"

"You can't possibly make seventy-five, can you?" said Enoch, after he had performed a little problem in mental arithmetic. "Well, if you've got to stay behind, I'll stay too. How about that picnic.? Lester hasn't been near me in a long time. He and his crowd seem to hang together pretty well, and I shouldn't wonder if they had got their plans all laid."

"Let's hunt him up and have a talk with him," said Jones. "We have made him mad, and perhaps we shall have hard work to get him good-natured again."

"I don't care if he never gets good-natured again," answered Enoch. "I have long been of the opinion that we ought to throw that fellow overboard. We shall certainly see trouble through him if we do not."

"We'll see trouble if we do," said Jones, earnestly. "I have studied him pretty closely, and I have found out that there is no honor in him. We've gone too far to drop him now. If we should attempt it, he'd blow on us as sure as the world."

Jones struck pretty close to the mark when he said this, for Lester had already set his wits to work to conjure up some plan to keep the boys who would not side with him at the academy while he and the rest were off on their cruise. He had decided that when the proper time came he would make an effort to induce Enoch to go with him, and if he refused, he (Lester) would take care to see that he didn't go at all. He would contrive some way to let the superintendent know what he and Jones and their crowd intended to do, "Brigham is no sailor, and there's where the trouble is coming in," said Enoch.

"I confess that I have often had my fears on that point," replied Jones; "but we mustn't think of leaving him behind. Let him act as leader, if he can, until we are fairly afloat, and then, if we find he doesn't know what he is about, we can easily depose him and put you in his place."

"I don't care to be captain," said Enoch. "I'd just as soon go before the mast, provided there is somebody on the quarter-deck who understands his business. These racing boats are cranky things, and sometimes they turn bottom side up without any provocation at all. There's Brigham now."

Lester was delighted to learn that his two old cronies were ready to side with him, but he did not show it. He appeared to be quite indifferent.

"I listened with all my ears when the last week's standing was announced, and I know very well what it was that brought you over to me," said he, addressing himself to Jones. "You're going to fall below seventy-five in spite of all you can do, and Enoch doesn't want to go to Hamilton without you. I'll have to talk to the boys about it. Perhaps they will say they don't want you, because you went back on us once."

"I say we didn't go back on you or anybody else," said Enoch, looking savagely at Lester. "We are ready to stand by our agreement, and you are not."

Jones and Williams, believing that Lester was not very favorably disposed toward them, thought it would be a good plan to talk to the boys about it themselves. They found that some were glad to welcome them back, but that those who wanted to go to Hamilton and who were working hard, and with a fair prospect of success, to win the required number of marks, met their advances rather coldly.

"Let the celebration go and come with us," urged Jones. I'll warrant you'll see more fun on the bay than you will in marching about the dusty streets of Hamilton while the mercury is away up in the nineties."

"Sour grapes!" exclaimed one of the boys. "Look here, Jones. A little while ago this parade was the grandest thing that ever was thought of, and you wouldn't miss it for any amount of money. You tried your best to win a place in the ranks of your company, but you failed, and now you want us to fail, too. I can't see the beauty of that."

There was more than one who couldn't see it—boys who spent all their time with their books and watched themselves closely, in the hope of attaining to the required standing. Some succeeded and others did not. Those who failed fell back into the ranks of Lester's crowd, angry and discouraged, and ready for anything that would close the doors of that school against them forever. The fortunate ones, turning a deaf ear to the pleadings of their companions, but promising to keep a still tongue in their heads regarding the proposed picnic, went to the city with their company, and we must hasten on to tell what happened to them while on the way, and what they did after they got there.

While these things were going on inside of the academy, some stirring events, in which a few of the students finally became personally interested, were occurring outside of it. The daily papers, to which many of the boys were subscribers, began to speak of railroad strikes, and in every issue there was a column or more of telegrams relating to "labor troubles." The boys read them, simply because they wanted to keep themselves posted, as far as they could, in all that was going on in the world; but they paid no particular attention to them. The news came from distant points and did not affect them in any way, because they were independent of the railroads and would be until September. If the hands on the Bordentown branch, the road that ran from Oxford through Bridgeport to Hamilton, wanted to strike for higher wages, they could do it and welcome. There was no law to prevent them. In fact, the students hoped they would do it, for then they could shoulder their muskets and march to the city, as the majority of them wanted to do.

Time passed and things began to assume a more serious aspect. The strike became general and trouble was feared. The strikers would not work themselves nor would they allow others to work; and when men came to take their places they won them over to their side, or assaulted them with clubs and stones and drove them away. The lawless element of the country, the "dangerous classes,"—the thieves, loafers, tramps and socialists, who had everything to make and nothing to lose, joined with the strikers; and although the latter repudiated and denounced them in strong language, they did not send them away. The police could do nothing, and finally the National Guard was called out; but its presence did not seem to have any effect. The most of the guard were working men, and the strikers did not believe they would use their weapons even if ordered to do so. At Buffalo the mob threw aside the bayonets that were crossed in front of the door of a machine shop, and went in and compelled the men to stop work. Not satisfied with that they attacked the company that was guarding the shop and put it to flight. A Chicago paper announced, with much trepidation, that there were twenty thousand well-armed socialists in that city, who were threatening to do all sorts of terrible things; a Baltimore mob stoned and scattered the soldiers who had been sent there to preserve order; New York was like a seething cauldron, almost ready to boil over; the strikers and their allies had got beyond control at Pittsburg, and were destroying the property of the railroad companies; and thus were ushered in "those dark days in July, 1877, when the whole land was threatened with anarchy."

"I tell you, boys, this is becoming interesting," said Egan, as he and his particular friends met one morning on the parade ground, each with a paper in his hand. "Just listen to this despatch from Pittsburg: 'A large force of strikers has captured a train, and is running about the country, picking up arms and ammunition wherever they can be found. A regiment is expected from Philadelphia this evening.'"

(This regiment didn't do any good after it arrived. It was whipped at once, driven out of the city, and every effort was made by the strikers and their friends to have its commanding officer indicted for murder, because he defended himself when he was attacked.)

"That's the worst news I have heard yet," said Curtis, anxiously. "We've got about four hundred stand of arms and two thousand ball cartridges in the armory."

"That's so!" exclaimed the boys, in concert.

"And if the men who are employed on this railroad should take it into their heads to come here and get them—eh?" continued Curtis. "It would be worse than the fight with the Mount Pleasant Indians, wouldn't it?"

"I should say so," cried Hopkins, growing alarmed. "But these Bordentown fellows are all right yet."

"They've struck," said Don. "My paper says that Hamilton is in an uproar, that business is virtually suspended, that the mob is growing bolder every hour, and that the 61st has been ordered to hold itself in readiness to march at a moment's notice."

"I know that," said Hopkins. "The strikers have stopped all the freights, but they haven't yet interfered with the mail trains, nor have they attempted any violence."

"If they would only stick to that, they would have a good deal of sympathy," said Curtis. "But when they defy the law and trample upon the rights of other people, they ought to be put down with an iron hand, and I hope they will be."

"You may have a chance to assist at it," said Egan.

"I shouldn't wonder if he did," exclaimed Don, when the other boys smiled incredulously. "Mark my words: There's going to be trouble in Hamilton. There are a good many car-shops and founderies there, and one regiment, which numbers only four hundred and fifty men, can't be everywhere.

"And of those four hundred and fifty men how many do you suppose there are who do not sympathize with the strikers?" asked Egan.

"There are at least two companies—the Hamilton Tigers and the Sanford Guards," replied Hopkins. "You can depend on them every time."

"And if the others show a disposition to get up on their ears, there will be visiting troops enough to handle them without gloves," observed Curtis.

"I am afraid not," answered Don. "Rumor says that the most, if not all, the regiments that were expected to be there, have been ordered, by the adjutant-generals of their respective States, to stay at home."

"And some of the firemen have given notice that they will not turn out," added Hopkins.

"That knocks the parade higher than a kite," exclaimed Egan. "Well, there's no loss without some gain. The prospect of marching with the 61st, had a good effect on me. It made me study hard and behave myself. Hallo! what's the matter with you? Any startling news?"

This question was addressed to Sergeants Gordon and Elmer, who just then hurried up, bringing with them pale and anxious faces.

"Oh, fellows!" stammered Bert. "We're going to have trouble right here at the academy."

"No!" exclaimed all the boys at once.

"But I say we are," said Bert; who then went on to tell what had happened to Elmer and himself just a few minutes before. They had been sent to the village on business, and in going and coming they were obliged to pass the railroad depot. They noticed that there were a good many men gathered on the platform and standing around in little groups, all talking in low and earnest tones, but no one paid any attention to them until they came back, and then one of the truck hands, who was dressed in his Sunday clothes, stepped out and confronted them.

"Arrah, me foine gentlemen," said he, nodding with his head and winking his eyes vigorously, "it's a swate little rod we have in pickle fur yees, intirely; do yees moind that?"

The boys made no reply. They turned out and tried to go by the man, but he spread out his arms and stopped them both.

"We'll have thim foine soldier clothes aff the back of yees the day," said he, with a leer.

"Be good enough to let us pass," said Bert. "We have no desire to talk to you."

"Haven't yees now? Well, *I'll* spake to *yees*. Yer foine lookin' little b'ys to be takin' the brid from the mouth of the wurrukin' mon an' his childer, so ye are. I've a moind to knock the hids aff yees."

"Move on there, Mickey," commanded a policeman.

"Shure I will; but moind this, the hul of yees: We have min enough, an' there's more comin' from Hamilton, to take all the arrums yees have up there to the school-house beyant, and there'll not be a soldier nor a polace lift the night. We'll trample them into the ground like the dirt under our feet; an' so we will do with all the big min who want to grind down the wurrukin' mon; ain't that so, me brave b'ys?"

The "brave boys" who were standing around did not confirm these words, and neither did they deny them. They looked sullen and savage, and the two sergeants were glad to hurry on and leave them out of sight.

"He said they were going to clean us out to-night, did he," exclaimed Don, when Bert had finished his story. "Well, they will have a good time of it. Some of the boys are pretty fair shots."

"Oh, I hope it won't come to that," said Sergeant Elmer.

"So do I," said Don. "But there's only one way to reason with a mob, and that is to thrash them soundly."

"I don't see why that man should pitch into us," observed Bert. "If he would go to work, he would get bread enough for himself and his children. If the working man is 'ground down' we had no hand in it."

"Of course not," said Egan. "But you wear a uniform and are supposed to be strongly in favor of law and order."

"And we are, too," said Bert, emphatically.

"Well, that man knew it, and that was the reason he talked to you in the way he did," continued Egan. "He and his kind hate a soldier as cordially as they hate the police, because the soldier is always ready to step in and help the policeman when the mob gets too strong for him; and when the boys in blue take a hand in the muss, the rioters generally hear something drop. Now, Bert, you and Elmer had better go and report to the superintendent."

All that day the excitement at the academy was intense, and it was no wonder that the lessons were bad, that such faithful fellows as Mack, Egan, Curtis and Bert Gordon came in for the sternest reprimands, or that the teachers looked worried and anxious—all except Professor Odenheimer. He was in his element, for he scented the battle from afar. His lectures were full of fight, and never had his classes listened to them with so much interest. When night came the excitement increased. It was plain that the superintendent had received information which led him to believe that it was best to be prepared for any emergency, for the guards were doubled, mattresses were issued to the members of the first company who bunked in the armory, and the boys who went on post were supplied with ball cartridges.

Another thing that increased the excitement and added to the general disquiet and alarm, was the rumor that all idea of a parade had been abandoned, and that the brigade commander had asked the superintendent what he could do for him, if help were needed at Hamilton. There was a mob there, and it was having things all its own way. It was growing stronger and bolder all the while, the police were afraid of it, the majority of the soldiers sympathized with it, and the only company that had done anything was the Hamilton Tigers, which had cleared the depot at the point of the bayonet.

"Didn't I say there would be trouble in the city before this thing was settled?" asked Don Gordon of some of his friends whom he met in the armory when dress parade was over.

"And didn't I say that the Tigers would do their duty every time?" answered Hopkins. "But do you suppose the superintendent will order any of us down there?"

"Why shouldn't he?" inquired Curtis in his quiet way.

"Because we don't belong to the National Guard, and there is no precedent for any such proceeding," answered Hopkins.

"There's where you are mistaken," said Egan. The students at the Champaign Agricultural College in Illinois didn't belong to the National

Guard, but when Chicago was burned some of them were ordered up there to protect property, and I never heard it said that they didn't do their duty as well as men could have done it. It will be no boy's play, but I shall hold myself in readiness to volunteer with the company that is ordered down there."

"Well, I won't," said a voice.

The boys looked around and saw Williams, Jones, Lester Brigham and several of that crowd standing close by. The faces of the most of them were very pale, and Lester was trembling visibly. Under ordinary circumstances they would have been ordered away at once; but class etiquette was forgotten now. The young soldiers had something else to think about.

"I didn't come here to fight," continued Enoch Williams, "and I won't do it, either."

"How are you going to help yourself?" asked Curtis. "Will you skip over to Canada? That's what some of the Hamilton boys have done."

"No; but I'll refuse to do duty, and stay here under arrest," replied Enoch.

"And be court-martialed for cowardice and disgracefully dismissed the academy when the trouble is over," said Egan. "Don't let the people down in Maryland hear of it, Enoch. They'll cut you, sure."

"I don't care if they do," was the defiant response. "I have no desire to be knocked in the head with a coupling-pin."

The other boys didn't want to be treated that way either, but they had no intention of shirking their duty, They didn't care to talk with Enoch and his friends, and so they turned away and left them alone.

There was little sleeping done in the academy that night, and those who did slumber kept one eye and both ears open, and were ready to jump at the very first note of alarm. It came shortly after midnight. All on a sudden the clear blast of a bugle rang through the silent building, being followed an instant later by the "long roll." There was a moment's hush, and then hasty footsteps sounded in the different halls, and heavy blows were showered upon the dormitory doors, mingled with loud cries of, "Fall in! Fall in!"

"The mob has come! Now we'll know how it seems to engage in a real battle," were the words with which each boy encouraged his room-mate, as he sprang out of bed and pulled on his clothes. "The rioters at Hamilton number ten thousand men; and if they have all come up here, what can three hundred boys do with them?"

There were some pale faces among the young soldiers who jerked open their doors and ran at the top of their speed towards the armory, but not one of them was seen to falter. Some of them *did* falter, however, but we shall see that they did not escape detection.

In a great deal less than the six minutes that were usually allotted for falling in in the morning, the majority of the boys were in line and ready for business. And that there was business to be done they did not doubt, for no sooner had the companies been formed than they were marched down the stairs in double time and out of the building, which in a few seconds more was surrounded by a wall of bayonets; but they could neither see nor hear anything of the mob.

"I say, Hop," whispered Don to his fat friend who stood next to him in the ranks, "this is another put-up job. There are no cartridges in my box."

"That's so," said Hopkins, after he had satisfied himself that his own box was empty. "The teachers only wanted to test our pluck."

Just then the big bell in the cupola was struck once—half-past twelve—and a few seconds later the voice of a sentry rang out on the quiet air.

"No. 1. All's well!" shouted the guard; and this assurance removed a heavy burden of anxiety from the mind of more than one boy in the ranks.

The whole thing was out now, and as there was nothing to be gained by standing there in the dark, the companies were marched back to the armory and the roll was called. The ranks of the first and second companies were full, Jones and a few like him were missing from Don's, and Bert found, to his great mortification, that fully a dozen of his men had failed to respond to their names. The reports were made through the usual channels, and when the result was announced to the superintendent, he ordered details from the third and fourth companies to hunt up the delinquents. The rest of the battalion were brought to "parade rest" and kept there, until the missing boys were brought in. Some of them had been taken ill as soon as they heard the order to fall in; others had sought safety and concealment in the attic; and a few had been found in the cellar and pulled out of the coal-bins. They looked very crestfallen and ashamed when they found themselves drawn up in line in full view of their companions, and expected to receive the sternest kind of a reprimand; but the superintendent did not once look toward them.

"Young gentlemen," said he, addressing himself to the boys who stood in the ranks, "I am much pleased with the result of my experiment. I did not expect so prompt a response from so many of you. The honors belong to the third company. It was the first to fall in, and Captain Mack was the first to report himself and his men ready for duty. I shall bear that company in mind. You can now return to your respective dormitories and go to sleep with the full assurance that there is no mob here and none coming. All is quiet in the city. The 61st is under arms, but no trouble is apprehended. Break ranks!"

"Attention, company! Carry arms! Right face! Arms port! Break ranks, march!" shouted the several captains; and the boys scattered and deposited their muskets in their proper places, each one congratulating himself and his neighbor on the indefinite postponement of the fight with the mob, which the most of them believed would be sure to take place sooner or later. The members of Don's company had reason to be proud of themselves, but there were some among them who shook their heads dubiously whenever they recalled the superintendent's words: "I shall bear that company in mind." What did he mean by that?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIGHT AS REPORTED.

"IT means that if the authorities at Hamilton need help in putting down that mob, we third company boys will have to give it," said Egan, in reply to a question propounded to him by Captain Mack.

"What do you mean by *we?*" inquired the captain. "You don't belong to my company."

"Yes, I do, and so do Hop and Curtis," answered Egan. "We intend to report for duty in the morning; and as long as this strike lasts, we are to stand post and do duty like the rest of the boys. We asked permission of the superintendent to-day, and he granted it."

Of course he granted it. Faithful students, like these three boys, were allowed to do pretty nearly as they pleased. It was the idle and unruly who were denied privileges.

"I am glad to welcome such fellows as you are into my family," said Captain Mack. "But why didn't you go into the first company where you belong?"

"We belong wherever it suits us to go," said Egan, in reply. "And it suits us to be with you and Don Gordon. Look here, Mack: If worst comes to worst, and the superintendent calls for volunteers, you be the first to jump. Do you hear? Good night and pleasant dreams."

The students hastened back to their rooms, and feeling secure from an attack by the mob, the most of them slept; but their dreams, like Captain Mack's, were none of the pleasantest. More than one of them started up in alarm, believing that he heard the order to fall in. They all expected it, and it came the next day about eleven o'clock, but the majority of the boys did not know it until dinner time; and then Don Gordon, who had been acting as the superintendent's orderly that morning, rushed frantically about the building looking for Egan and the rest.

"The time has come, fellows," said he, when he found them. "Some of us will have to face the music now."

"How do you know?" asked Egan and his friends, in a breath.

"The superintendent received a despatch from the city a short time ago."

"Do you know what was in it?"

"I do, for I heard him read it to one of the teachers. It ran: 'Hold a company, provided with ten rounds per man, ready to move at short notice.' The answer that went back was: 'The company is ready.'"

"Whew!" whistled Curtis, while the others looked at one another in blank amazement.

"But I don't see how that company is to get to Hamilton," said Hopkins, at length. "There are no trains running to-day. Everything is as quiet as it is on Sunday."

"They will go by special train," said Don. "There are a good many passengers and a big mail that were left at Munson last night when the engineer of the lightning express was taken by force from his cab, and the mob has agreed to let them come on to Hamilton. It was all talked over in my hearing."

"And our boys are to go on that train, are they?"

"Yes; if they get marching orders in time."

"Then there'll be trouble. Remember what I tell you; there will be the biggest kind of a fuss down there," said Curtis, earnestly. "The rioters didn't agree to let soldiers into the city, and they won't do it, either."

"Did it ever occur to you, that very possibly the wishes of the rabble will not be consulted?" inquired Hopkins. "I hope that company will go in if it is needed there, and that the very first man who fires a stone into its ranks will get hurt."

Just then the enlivening notes of the dinner-call sounded through the building, and the students made all haste to respond to it. The different companies formed in their respective halls, but when they had been aligned and brought to a right face by their quartermaster-sergeants, the captains took command, ordered the sergeants to their posts, and marched their men to the armory instead of to the dining-hall. They all wondered what was going to happen now, and they were not kept long in suspense.

"Young gentlemen," said the superintendent, when all the companies had come into line, "our friends in Hamilton are in need of assistance, and we, being law-loving and law-abiding men and boys, and utterly opposed to mob rule, can not refuse to give it to them. It may be—nay, I am sure, from what I have heard, that it is a mission of danger; and therefore I shall not ask any of you to go to the city against your will. Those of you who are in favor of the law, and who have the courage to enforce it if you are called upon to do so, will step three paces to the front."

These words, which were spoken so rapidly that those who heard them did not have time to think twice, fairly stunned the boys. Egan, who stood next the first sergeant of the third company, was the first to recover himself. Reaching around behind the sergeant he gave Captain Mack a prod in the ribs with his fist that fairly knocked him out of his place in the ranks; but it brought him to his senses, and raising his hand to his cap the captain said:

"I speak for my company, sir."

"Your services are accepted," said the superintendent. "You are too late, young gentlemen," he added, addressing himself to the boys in the first and second companies who moved forward in a body, together with the majority of the members of Bert's company. "You ought to have had an old first-sergeant in your ranks to wake you up."

This was Greek to some of the students, but Mack understood it and so did Egan. So did the boys directly behind them, who had seen Egan strike the captain in the ribs to "wake him up."

"If your conduct last night is any criterion, I shall have reason to be proud of you when you return," continued the superintendent, turning to the third company boys. "I shall expect you to do your duty regardless of consequences; and in order that you may work to the best advantage, I shall make some changes in your *personnel.*"

Here the superintendent paused and looked at the adjutant, who stepped forward and drew his note-book from his pocket.

"Mack, you're a brick," said Egan, in an audible whisper.

"He's a born fool," said Jones to the boy who stood next him. "I didn't give him authority to speak for me, and I'll not stir one step. If he wants to go down there and be pounded to death by that mob, he can go and welcome; but he shall not drag me along with him."

"It is not expected that boys who take refuge in the attic or hide in coal-bins, or who are seized with the pangs of sickness at the very first notes of a false alarm, would be of any use to you if you should get into trouble," added the superintendent. "Consequently those boys will be permitted to remain at the academy. As fast as their names are called they will fall out of the ranks and form a squad by themselves under command of Sergeant Elmer, who will have charge of them until their company returns."

Some of those who had behaved with so much timidity the night before, thought this the severest punishment that could be inflicted upon them. They were virtually branded as cowards in the presence of the whole school, and they felt it most keenly; but the others, those who had determined to be sent down since their parents would not allow them to leave the academy, as they wanted to do, did not seem to mind it at all. They were perfectly willing to be disgraced. They fell out of the ranks as their names were called, and after their places had been supplied by boys from the first nd second companies whom the superintendent knew he could trust, they were all marched down to the dining-hall.

There was little dinner eaten that day, for their excitement took away all their appetites. The hum of animated conversation arose above the clatter of knives and forks from all except the third company boys, who were already looked upon as heroes by some of their companions. They were going down to the city to face an infuriated mob, and who can tell what the result might be? These boys talked only in whispers, and the all-absorbing question with them was: What teacher would be sent in command of them? Everybody seemed to think it would be Professor Odenheimer, who, by his fiery lectures, had now the appellation of "Fighting Jacob," which the students transformed into "Viting Yawcop." Everybody seemed to think, too, that if he were sent in command, they would stand a fine chance of getting into a fight, whether the mob forced it upon them or not.

The study-call was not sounded that afternoon, because the teachers knew that there would be no studying done. The students gathered in little groups in the building and about the grounds, and there was an abundance of talk, argument and speculation. They were all anxious for news, and it did not take long to raise a crowd. If a teacher, an officer or an orderly stopped for a moment to exchange a word or two with one of the students, they were very soon joined by a third, the number was rapidly augmented, and a large assembly was quickly gathered. The wildest rumors were freely circulated as facts, and if the third company boys had believed half they heard, it is hard to tell whether or not their courage would have stood the test. The excitement arose to fever-heat when a messenger-boy, who had been passed by the sentry at the gate, ran up the walk with a brown envelope in his hand.

"What is it? What is it?" cried the students, as he dashed through their ranks.

"It's for the superintendent," was the boy's reply.

"But what does it say?"

"Don't know; only there's the very mischief to pay down at Hamilton. The special is due in fifteen minutes."

"Then we're off, boys," said Egan; and so it proved. A few minutes after the messenger-boy vanished through the door, a sergeant appeared on the steps and cried out: "Fall in, third company!" whereupon all the boys made a rush for the armory. Don and his comrades made all haste to put on their belts and epaulets and take their muskets from the racks, while the rest of the students drew themselves up in line behind the teachers so that they could see all that was going on.

"Fall in!" commanded the first sergeant. "Left face! Support arms! Listen to roll-call!"

Each boy in the ranks brought his piece to a "carry" and then to "order arms," as his name was called, and when this ceremony was completed the company was again brought to a "carry," and ordered to "count fours"; after which the sergeant proceeded to divide it into platoons. Then he faced about, saluted his commander and said, with a ring of triumph in his tones:

"All present, sir."

There was no one hiding in the attic or coal-bins this time.

"Fix bayonets," said the captain.

The sergeant gave the order and moved to his place on the right of the company, leaving the captain in command. His first move was to open the ranks, and his next to order the quarter-master-sergeant to supply each man with ten rounds of ammunition. Candor compels us to say that the sergeant did not strictly obey this order. He was careful to put ten cartridges, and no more, into each box, but he did not scruple to put three or four extra ones into the hand that was holding the box open.

By this time the boys had found out who was to be their real commander. It was Mr. Kellogg, the most popular instructor at the academy. He was a modest, unassuming gentleman, but he was a soldier all over. He had served in the army of the Potomac, and had twice been carried to the rear and laid among the dead. The boys knew he was going with them, for he was dressed in fatigue uniform and wore a sword by his side.

The cartridges having been distributed and the company brought to close order, it was marched out of the armory and down the stairs. When the other students saw it preparing to move, they rushed out in a body, ran to the gate, and drawing themselves up in line on each side of the walk, stood ready to give their friends a good "send off."

When the company marched through their ranks, led by the band which was to accompany it to the depot, they broke out into deafening cheers, which Captain Mack and his men answered with a will. Don caught just one glimpse of his brother's face as he passed. It was whiter than his own.

The students followed the company as far as the gate, and then ran along the fence to keep it in view as long as they could; but all they could see of it were the bayonets, the young soldiers themselves being wholly concealed by the crowd of citizens who had assembled to see them off. The men cheered them lustily, the ladies waved their handkerchiefs, and the girls threw flowers at them until a bend in the road hid them from sight. Then the boys who were left behind turned away from the fence, and walked slowly toward the academy.

"I'd much rather be here than with them," said Jones to his friend Lester, and the latter did not doubt it, for Jones was one of the boys who had been found in the cellar. Lester had hidden his head under the bed-clothes when he heard the bugle, and pleaded sickness when Bert Gordon and his squad came to pull him out. "I suppose the teachers think I feel very much disgraced because I was left behind, but I don't. I didn't come here to fight, and when my father hears of this, he will tell me to start for home at once. But I shan't go until I get a good ready, and then I am going in my own way. I am going to do something that will make these fellows remember me. I said it long ago, and I mean it."

"It is my opinion that this day's work will break up this school," observed Enoch Williams. "I know my father will not allow me to stay here after he hears of it."

"Wouldn't this be a good time to go off on our cruise?" inquired Lester.

"I am afraid not," answered Jones. "I should like to go this very night; but as things look now, I am of the opinion that we shall have to wait until next month. We don't want to fail when we make the attempt, for if we do, we shall be watched closer than we are now."

"I don't want to stay here," said Lester. "Suppose they should need more help in the city, and that my company should be ordered down there?"

"You need not waste any time in worrying over that," was the encouraging reply. "Your company is composed of nothing but raw recruits; and even if it should be ordered there, *you* wouldn't go. You would be told to stay behind, as I was."

Lester found some satisfaction in this assurance, but he found none whatever in being snubbed as he was. Even the boys in his own company—those who had promptly responded when ordered to fall in the night before—would not look at him. If two of them were talking and Lester came up to hear what they were saying, they would turn their backs upon him without ceremony and walk away. All the boys who had concealed themselves or played off sick when the false alarm was sounded, were treated in the same way by their fellows, and all the companionship they could find was in the society of students who were as timid as they were. This had at least one good effect, so Lester thought. It brought many friends to the boys who intended to desert the academy and run away in the yacht, and before the day was over Lester, Jones and Enoch had revealed their scheme to half a dozen or more new fellows, who heartily approved of it and promised to aid them by every means in their power. But after all they did not take as much interest in, or show as much enthusiasm for, the scheme, as Lester and the rest thought they ought to. The strike was the all-absorbing topic of conversation, and the possible fate of the boys who had gone down to the city to confront the mob, made many an anxious face.

Although all study was over for the day, everything else was done as usual, but nothing was done well. The students were thinking of something beside their duties, and made blunders and received reprimands without number. As the hours wore on, the excitement gave place to alarm. The third company ought to have reached Hamilton at eight o'clock, if everything had gone well with them, and now it was long after ten and not a despatch had been received.

"I am really afraid something has happened to them, Sam," said Sergeant Gordon, as he and Corporal Arkwright paced up and down the walk in front of the guard-room in which sat the German professor, who was deeply interested in his paper. These two boys were on duty until midnight, and they wished they were going to stay on until morning, for they knew they could not sleep if they tried. "My brother promised to telegraph me just as soon as he reached the city," continued Bert, "and he would surely have done so, if something had not occurred to——"

"Corporal of the guard, No. 1," shouted the sentry at the gate.

"Zetz auber!" exclaimed the professor, throwing down his paper. "Go out dere, gorporal. Mebbe dot ish somedings from Meester Gellock."

The corporal went, and Bert went with him. If there were a messenger-boy at the gate, his despatch might be from Don instead of Professor Kellogg; but there was no messenger-boy to be seen. On the opposite side of the tall, iron gate were a couple of men who peered through the bars occasionally, and then looked behind and on both sides of them as if to make sure that there was no one watching their movements.

"These fellows affirm that they are just from the city," said the sentry, in a husky and trembling voice. "They have brought bad news. They say that our boys were cut all to pieces by the rioters."

Bert's heart seemed to stop beating. Without waiting to ask the sentry any questions, he passed on to the gate and waited for the men to speak to him. He could not have said a word to them to save his life.

"We thought we had better come up here and let you know about it," said one of the visitors, at length. "The strikers are awful mad, and declare they are going to burn the academy."

"Who are you?" demanded Bert, after he had taken time to recover his breath.

"We're strikers, but we're friends," was the answer. "We live here in Bridgeport and had to strike with the rest to escape getting our heads broken. We saw the fight to-night, but we didn't take any part in it."

"The fight?" gasped Bert.

"Yes; and it was a lively one, I tell you. I didn't know the boys had so much pluck. But there were three thousand of the mob and only about eighty of them, and so they had no show."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Bert. "What became of our boys?"

"We don't know, for we lost no time in getting out of that when we found that there were bullets flying through the air; but some of the strikers told us that they whipped the cadets, and that those of them who could get away ran like sheep."

"Corporal, go into the sentry's box and get the key," said Bert. "I shall have to ask you to make your report to the officer of the guard."

"All right," said the man who did the talking. "That's what we came here for; but we want to be as sly as we can in getting in and out, for if we should be seen here, we'd have trouble directly. Bridgeport is in a tumult of excitement, and there are lots of spies here. We came up from Town Line on a hand-car with a lot of them. The lads must have got in some pretty good work before they were whipped, or else the strikers would not be so mad at them."

"Was there a fight, sure enough?" said Bert, as the corporal came up with the key and opened the gate. He was so astounded and terrified that, although he heard all the man said to him, he did not seem to comprehend it.

"Well, I should say there was a fight. I tell you, it must have been hot in that car, and I don't see how a single boy in it could possibly come out alive?"

"Then some of our friends must have been hurt?" faltered Bert.

"Of course. I don't believe a dozen of the whole company came out uninjured."

Bert wanted to ask if his informant had heard the names of any of the wounded, but the words he would have uttered stuck in his throat. While he was trying to get them out he reached the guard-room, and ushered the visitors into the presence of Professor Odenheimer.

"These men, sir, desire to make report concerning a fight that took place between our boys and the mob at Hamilton," said the sergeant; and then he backed off and stood ready to hear what they had to say in addition to what they had already told him.

The excitable Prussian started as if he had been shot. "Our poys did have a pattle?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir, they did," answered one of the men.

"Donder and blixen! I don't can pelieve dot."

"They say they have just come from there, sir," interposed Bert.

The professor jumped to his feet, dashed his spectacles upon the table, and broke into a torrent of German ejaculations indicative of the greatest wonder and excitement. His next question was, not "Were any of the boys injured?" but—

"Did dem gadets make good fighting? Dot's vot I vant to know."

The men replied that they had done wonders.

"Dot's all right! Dot's *all* right," exclaimed Mr. Odenheimer, rubbing his hands gleefully together. "Zargeant, you and de gorporal vait oudside and I will hear de rebort of dese men. So dem gadets make good fighting! I been glad to hear dot. Seet down in dem chairs and told me all apout it."

The non-commissioned officers reluctantly withdrew, and the professor was left alone with the visitors.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE HANDS OF THE MOB.

"DUTCHY is a hard-hearted old wretch," said Corporal Arkwright indignantly. "He never asked if any of our boys were wounded."

"Of course he didn't," replied Bert. "He took it for granted. If the fight was as desperate as those men say it was, we shall soon have a sorrowful report from Hamilton. I ought to write to my mother at once, but I haven't the courage to do it."

The boys waited outside, as they were told to do, but they used their best endeavors to overhear what passed between the professor and his visitors. They had their trouble for their pains, however. The men talked in low tones, and beyond an occasional ebullition of wrath from Mr. Odenheimer, who invariably spoke in German, they could hear nothing. Presently the door opened, and the three came out and hastened toward the academy.

"It is fully as serious as we thought, Sam," said Sergeant Gordon. "They are going in to tell their story to the superintendent."

Bert never slept a wink that night. He was at the gate at daylight, and was the first to purchase a paper when the newsboys came around. As he opened the sheet with trembling hands, his eye fell upon the following paragraph :

"WEDNESDAY MORNING, 3 O'CLOCK.—We have delayed the issue of our paper until this morning, hoping to obtain direct information from Hamilton; but we have heard nothing but vague rumors, which grew out of all proportion as they traveled. That the academy boys had a brush with the strikers is evident. They were met before reaching the city by an immense mob, and a fight ensued, in which some of our boys were wounded. The following despatch, taken from last night's *Town Line Democrat*, despite some inaccuracies, probably has a few grains of truth in it :

'This evening, when the Bridgeport Cadets got into Hamilton they were stopped by striking rioters, who shoved their car upon a side track, and then commenced stoning and shooting them. The Cadets, after standing the fusillade for some time, opened fire and delivered volley after volley, wounding thirty persons and killing many. The rioters finally succeeded in getting upon the car and overpowering the company, capturing the guns, and driving the boys out of the city.'

"Nine members of the academy company, having become separated from their fellows in the *mêlée*, took the back track and are expected home to-day."

After making himself master of everything in the paper that related to the fight, Bert went into the academy and handed the sheet to the orderly, with the request that he would give it to the superintendent as soon as he got up. It was probable, he thought, that the latter would want to do something to assist those nine boys who were now on their way home. When they arrived he might be able to learn something about Don; and in the mean time he could do nothing but wait.

No study-call was sounded that morning, and the day promised to be a dark and gloomy one; but about ten o'clock little rays of sunshine began breaking through the clouds. The first came when the word was passed for Bert Gordon. He hurried into the superintendent's office and was presented with a despatch. He was about to go out with it when the superintendent said:

"Read it here, sergeant. There may be news in it, and we should like to know what it is, if you have no objections."

Bert tore open the envelope and read aloud the following from Don, who had telegraphed at the very earliest opportunity:

"Got in this morning after a night of trouble. No violence offered in the city. I am all right, and so is Curtis, but our unlucky friend Hop is missing, and Egan is wounded."

Every one present drew a long breath of relief when Bert read these words. This was the first reliable news they had received, and it removed a heavy burden of anxiety from their minds.

"So it seems that the company was not cut to pieces after all," said the superintendent. "It is probable that the boys were roughly handled, but that didn't keep them from going into the city. I feel greatly encouraged."

And so did everybody. Bert would have felt quite at his ease if he could have got over worrying about Hopkins and Egan. He feared the worst. But then his fat crony was fortunate in some respects even if he were unlucky in others, and it was possible that he might yet turn up safe and sound and as jolly as ever, and that Egan's wound might not be a serious one.

After that despatches came thick and fast. As soon as they were received they were read aloud to the students, who made the armory ring with their yells of delight when one came from Professor Kellogg stating that Captain Mack and his men had behaved with the utmost gallantry. Thirty-two of the company were fit for duty, although they had but seventeen guns among them, eight were slightly wounded, but, having good care, were doing well, and the rest were missing. They had whipped the mob twice and carried their wounded off the field.

"I tell you it makes a good deal of difference where the news comes from—from your own side or from the enemy's," said Bert. "Things don't look as dark as they did. I wish those nine boys who are now on the way home would hurry up. I am impatient to talk to them."

"They will soon be here," replied one of the students. "I heard the superintendent say that the citizens have sent carriages after them."

While those at the academy are waiting for these boys, let us go back to the third company and see what really happened to them, and how they acted when they found themselves surrounded by the mob. Of course they did not know what was in store for them, but the majority made up their minds that they would be called upon to face something decidedly unpleasant when they reached Hamilton, for their train had hardly moved away from the depot before it was whispered from one boy to another that some one on the platform had been heard to say that they (the students) were going into a hotter place than they ever dreamed of. Still they kept up a good heart, although they did not at all like the looks of the crowds of men and boys who were assembled at every station along the road. They did not know that two unhanged villains, Michael Lynch, the fireman of their train, and William Long, the Western Union operator at Bridgeport, had conspired to make their reception at Hamilton a warmer one than they had bargained for, by sending a despatch announcing their departure to an office in the lower part of the city that was in the hands of the strikers.

For a while it looked as though the ball would be set in motion at Town Line; for the large depot through which their train passed was literally packed with strikers and their aids and sympathizers, who had a good deal to say about the young soldiers and their object in going to the city. But they went through without any trouble, and when they reached a little station a few miles beyond, Professor Kellogg telegraphed for orders. These having been received the train moved on again, and Captain Mack came and perched himself upon the arm of the seat in which Don and Egan were sitting.

"I tell you, fellows, this begins to look like war times," said he.

"Where are we going, and what are we to do when we get there?" inquired Egan.

"We are not going into the city to-night," answered the captain. "We are sent down here simply to act as guards, and if there is any fighting to be done, the 61st will have to do it. Our orders read in this way: 'You will leave the train at Hamilton creek and guard the railroad property there during the night. Use such cars as you can, and keep all the guards out that may be necessary.' There are no signs of a gathering at the creek, but in order to be on the safe side the professor has ordered the conductor to let us out at least a quarter of a mile from the bridge. If a mob appears anywhere along the road, we are to get off and form before we go up to it."

There was nothing in these plans with which any military man could have found fault. They would have met the requirements of the case in every particular, had it not been for the fact that Professor Kellogg had to deal with men who were as treacherous as the plains Indians are said to be. There *was* a mob at the bridge, and the engineer saw it long before he reached it. In fact he ran through a part of it, and did not stop his train until he was right in the midst of it. The first thing the boys knew their car was standing still, hoarse yells and imprecations which disturbed their dreams for many a night afterward were arising on all sides of them, and the rioters were crowding upon the platforms.

"Lave this kyar open; we're strong," said a man, in a voice which proclaimed his nationality; and as he spoke he threw open the rear door and placed one end of his heavy cane against it, at the same time drawing himself back out of sight as much as he could.

"Attention!" shouted Captain Mack, prompted by the professor; whereupon the young soldiers arose and stood in front of their seats. Their bayonets were fixed, they had loaded their guns when they left the station at which they had stopped for orders, and if they had been commanded to act at once, the mob never would have gained a footing in the car. But Mr. Kellogg did just what he ought not to have done—he stood in the front door, blocking the way as well as he could, and trying to reason with the leaders of the rabble, who demanded to know why he had come down there, and what he was going to do. The professor told them in reply that he was not going into the city that night, that he had been ordered to stop at the bridge and guard the railroad property there, and this seemed to satisfy the mob, who might have dispersed or gone back to Hamilton, as their leaders promised, had it not been for one unfortunate occurrence.

The attention of everybody in the car was directed toward the men who were gathered about the front door, and no one seemed to remember that there was a rear door at which no guard had been stationed. The rioters at that end of the car did not at first make themselves very conspicuous, for they did not like the looks of the muskets the young soldiers held in their hands; but in a very few minutes they grew bold enough to move across the platform in little squads, stopping on the way to take a hasty glance at the interior, and finally some of the reckless ones among them ventured to come in. These were followed by others, and in less time than it takes to tell it the aisle was packed with strikers, who even forced their way into the seats, crowding the boys out of their places. About this time Mr. Kellogg happened to look behind him, and seeing that he and his men were at the mercy of the mob—there were more strikers than soldiers in the car now—he called out to the conductor, who stood on the front platform, to go ahead with the train.

"I can't do it," was the reply. "The strikers are in full possession of it."

"Well, then, cut loose from us and go ahead with your passengers," said Professor Kellogg. "This is as far as I want to go anyhow."

"And you couldn't go any farther if you wanted to," said a loud-mouthed striker. "We'll have the last one of you hung up to the telegraph poles before morning."

"Who said that?" exclaimed one of the leaders at the front door. "Knock that man down, somebody, or make him keep his tongue still."

"Shove the car on to the switch," yelled somebody outside.

"Yes; run 'em into the switch!" yelled a whole chorus of hoarse voices. "Dump 'em over into the creek."

Some idea of the strength of the mob may be gained from the fact that the car, heavily loaded as it was, began to move at once, and in a few minutes it was pushed upon a side-track, and brought to a stand-still on the edge of a steep bank. While the car was in motion Don, who had grown tired of being squeezed, sought to obtain an easier position by stepping into his seat and sitting down on the back of it. As he did so he nearly lost his balance; whereupon a burly striker, who had stepped into his place as soon as he vacated it, reached out his hand and caught him, in the most friendly manner.

"Thanks," said Don, placing his hand on the striker's broad shoulder and steadying himself until he was fairly settled on his perch. "Now, since you have showed yourself to be so accommodating, perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me where those fellows on the outside are shoving us to, and what they intend to do with us."

"They are going to throw you into the creek, probably."

"I don't see any sense in that," observed Don. "What's the meaning of this demonstration, anyhow?"

"It means bread!" said the man so firmly that Don thought it best to hold his peace.

There were few in the mob who seemed inclined to talk. They answered all the questions that were asked them, but gave their entire attention to what was going on in the forward end of the car. Their recognized leaders were there, talking with Professor Kellogg, and they were waiting to see how the conference was going to end. Those who spoke for the strikers seemed to be intelligent men, fully sensible of the fact that Professor Kellogg and his company had not come to the city to trample upon the rights of the workingman, and for a time the prospect for a peaceful settlement of the points under discussion looked very bright indeed. But there were some abusive and violent ones in the mob who could not be controlled, and they always spoke up just at the wrong time.

"Take the bayonets off the guns!" piped a forward youngster, who ought to have been at home and in bed. "That's the way we did with the 61st."

"I'll tell you how to settle it," said a shrill voice, that was plainly audible in spite of the tumult in the car and the continuous yells of the mob outside. "If they're friendly toward us, as they say they are, let them give up their guns. We'll see that nobody harms them."

"Yes; that's the way to settle it," yelled the mob. "Let them give up their guns."

This proposition startled the young soldiers. If they agreed to it they would be powerless to defend themselves, and what assurance had they that the strikers would not wreak vengeance upon them? Nothing but the word of half a dozen men who could not have controlled the turbulent ones among their followers, even if they had been disposed to try. But fortunately Mr. Kellogg was not the man they took him for. As soon as the yells of approval had subsided so that he could make himself heard, his answer came clear and distinct;

"I shall not disarm my men; you may depend upon that."

"Let's run 'em back to Bridgeport, where they belong," shouted a striker.

"That's the idea," shouted the mob. "We don't want 'em here. Run 'em back where they came from. We can easy find an engine."

"I am not going back," replied the undaunted professor. "I was ordered to come here, and now that I got here, I am going to stay."

"Well, you shan't stay with these guns in your hands," said the shrill-voiced man. "All of us who are in favor of disarming them say 'I.'"

"I! I!" was the almost unanimous response.

If there were any present who were opposed to disarming the boys, they were not given an opportunity to say so. Encouraged by their overwhelming numbers, and by the fact that the mass of the soldiers were mere striplings to be strangled with a finger and thumb, the rioters went to work to secure the muskets, and then there was a scene to which no pen could do justice.

The fight, if such it could be called, was a most unequal one. That portion of the mob which had possession of the car, was composed almost entirely of rolling-mill hands, and not of "lazy, ragged tramps and boys," as a Hamilton paper afterward declared. They were powerful men, and the young soldiers were like infants in their grasp. But, taken at every disadvantage as they were, the most of the boys gave a good account of themselves. A few, terrified by the sight of the revolvers and knives that were flourished before their eyes, surrendered their weapons on demand, and even allowed their cartridge-boxes to be cut from their persons; but the others fought firmly to retain possession of their guns, and gave them up only when they were torn from their grasp. Among the latter was Don Gordon.

When the proposition to disarm the boys was put and carried, the man who was standing in Don's seat, and who had caught him when he came so near losing his balance, faced about, seized the boy's musket, and, in spite of all Don could do to prevent it, forced it over toward his friends in the aisle. A dozen hands quickly laid hold of it, but Don would not give it up. He held to it with all his strength, until one of the mob, enraged at his determined resistance, gave a sudden jerk, pulling the weapon out of his hands and compelling Don to turn a somerset over the back of his seat.

One thing that encouraged Don to make so desperate a struggle for the possession of his piece, was the heroic conduct of a little pale-faced fellow, Will Hovey by name, who occupied the seat in front of him. Will didn't look as though he had any too much courage, but his actions proved that he had plenty of it. He was confronted by a ruffian big enough to eat him up, who was trying to disarm him with one hand, while in the other he had a formidable looking knife with a blade that was a foot long.

"Give it up, I tell you," Don heard the striker say.

"I'll not do it," was Will's reply. "I'll die first."

The knife descended, and Don expected to see the brave boy killed before his eyes; but he dodged like a flash, just in the nick of time, and the glittering steel passed over his shoulder, cutting a great hole in his coat and letting out the lining. Will lost his gun in the end, but he wore that coat to the city, and was as proud of that rent as he would have been of a badge of honor. He was a soldier all over, and proved it by stealing a gun to replace the one the strikers had taken from him.

When Don was pulled over the back of his seat, he fell under the feet of a party of struggling men and boys, who stepped upon and knocked him about in the most unceremonious way, and it was only after repeated efforts that he succeeded in recovering his perpendicular. No sooner had he arisen to an upright position than he fell into the clutches of a striker who seized his waist-belt with one hand and tried to cut it from him with a knife he held in the other, being under the impression that if he succeeded, he would gain possession of the boy's cartridge-box. But there's where he missed his guess, for the cartridge-box which hung on one side and the bayonet scabbard that hung on the other, were supported by breast belts; and the waist belt was simply intended to hold them close to the person, so that they would not fly about too much when the wearer was moving at double time. Don, however, did not want that belt cut, and he determined that it should not be if he could prevent it. The striker was larger and much stronger than he was, but Don fought him with so much spirit that the man finally became enraged, and turned the knife against him. If he had had any chance whatever to use his weapon, he would certainly have done some damage; but he and Don were packed in so tightly among the strikers and the students, who were all mixed up together now, that neither one of them had an inch of elbow-room. The struggling crowd was gradually working its way toward the rear door, and Don saw that he must do something very quickly or be dragged out of the car into the hands of the outside mob. After trying in vain to disarm his assailant, and to free himself from his grasp by breaking the belt, he set to work to unhook it; but he was knocked about so promiscuously by the combatants on all sides of him, that he couldn't even do that.

How long the fight over the guns and cartridge-boxes continued no one knows; and the reports in our possession, which are full and explicit on all other points, are silent on this. But it took the strikers a long time to disarm the boys, and even then they had to leave without getting all the guns.

Up to this time not a shot had been fired or a stone thrown. The mob outside could not bombard the car for fear of injuring some of their own men, and the students could not shoot for the same reason. Besides, the order not to pull a trigger until they were told to do so was peremptory, and in his report Professor Kellogg takes pains to say that this command was strictly obeyed. The order to fire on the mob would have been given before it was but for one thing: The only officer who had the right to give it was being choked so that he could not utter a sound. The strikers were quick to see that Professor Kellogg was the head and front of the company, and believing that if they could work their will on him, they could easily frighten the boys into submission, they laid hold of him and tried to drag him out of the car; and failing in that, the door being blocked by their own men, who were anxious to crowd in and take a hand in the fracas, they bent the professor backward over the arm of a seat and throttled him. The students in his immediate vicinity defended him with the utmost obstinacy and courage, and a sword, and at least one bayonet, which went into the fight bright and clean, came out stained. At any rate the rioters did not succeed in killing the professor, as they fully intended to do, or in dragging him out of the door. After a desperate struggle he succeeded in freeing himself from their clutches, and as soon as he could speak, he called out:

"Clear the car! Clear the car!"

This was the order the students were waiting for, and if the order had not been so long delayed their victory would have been more complete than it was, for they would have had more guns to use. They went to work at once, and the way those rioters got out of that car must have been a surprise to their friends on the outside. Swords, bayonets and the butts of the muskets were freely used, and when the last rioter had jumped from the platform, the real business of the night commenced. All on a sudden the windows on both sides were smashed in, and stones, chunks of coal, coupling-pins, bullets and buck-shot rattled into the car like hail.

"Come on, me brave lads!" yelled a voice on the outside. "Let's have the last one of 'em out of there an' hang them to the brudge."

A simultaneous rush was made for both the doors, but the maddened mob had no sooner appeared than a sheet of flame rolled toward them, and they retreated with the utmost precipitancy. Forbearance was no longer a virtue. His own life and the lives of the boys under his charge were seriously threatened now, and with the greatest reluctance Professor Kellogg gave the order to fire. It was obeyed, and with the most telling effect. After repulsing three charges that were made upon the car, the boys turned their guns out of the windows, and firing as rapidly as they could reload, they drove the mob over the railroad track and forced them to take refuge behind the embankment.

Although the students had full possession of the car, their position was one of extreme danger. They were surrounded by a rabble numbering more than three thousand men, sixty of whom were armed with their own muskets, while the students had only seventeen left with which to oppose them; the rioters were securely hidden behind the embankment, while the car was brilliantly lighted, and if a boy showed the top of his cap in front of a window, somebody was sure to see and shoot at it; and worse than all, some of the mob, being afraid to run the gauntlet of the bullets which were flying through the air from both sides, had taken refuge under the car, and were now shooting through the bottom of it. One of the lieutenants was the first to discover this. He reported it to Captain Mack, and the latter reported it to the professor.

"That will never do," said Mr. Kellogg. "We must get out of here. Attention!"

The boys, who were crouched behind the seats and firing over the backs and around the sides of them, jumped to their feet and stepped out into the aisle, while Don opened the door so that they could go out.

"Where's your gun, Gordon?" demanded the professor.

"It was taken from me, sir," replied Don. "But I'll have another before many minutes."

Don knew very well that somebody would get hurt when they got out on the railroad, and if he were not hit himself, he wanted to be ready to take the gun from the hands of the first boy who *was* hit, provided that same boy had a gun. He secured a musket in this way, and he did good service with it, too.

CHAPTER X.

WELCOME HOME.

DON GORDON'S assailant kept him exceedingly busy in warding off the thrusts of the knife, and the boy had a lively time of it before he could escape from his clutches. When the students went to work to clear the car, Don hoped that the man would become frightened and let go his hold; but instead of that, he seemed all the more determined to pull his captive out of the door. In spite of his resistance Don was dragged as far as the stove, and there he made a desperate and final effort to escape. Placing his foot against the side of the door he threw his whole weight upon the belt, jerked it from the man's grasp and fell in the aisle all in a heap. When he scrambled to his feet the car was clear of strikers, his antagonist being the last to jump from the platform. Don was surprised to see how few there were left of the students. When they left Bridgeport there were more of them than the seats could accommodate; but there were only a handful of them remaining, and they were gathered in the forward end of the car. Where were the others? While Don stood in the aisle debating this question, two or three boys arose from their hiding-places under the seats and hurried past him.

"Come on, Gordon," said one. "The way is clear now."

"Where are you going?" asked Don.

"Anywhere to get out of the mob. Lots of our fellows have left the car and taken to their heels. Come on."

"Don't go out there," cried Don. "You will be safer if you stay with the crowd."

The boys, who were so badly frightened that they hardly knew what they were doing, paid no attention to him. They ran out of the car, and a minute later the rioters made their first charge, and the order was given to fire. This put life into Don, who lost no time in getting out of the range of the bullets in his companions' muskets. Stepping out of the aisle he made his way toward the forward end of the car, by jumping from the back of one seat to the back of another. As he was passing a window a coupling-pin, or some other heavy missile, came crushing through it, barely missing him and filling his clothing with broken glass. If it had hit him, it would probably have ended his career as a military student then and there.

Reaching the forward end of the car in safety the first thing Don saw, as he dropped to his knee by Egan's side, was a loaded musket; and the second was one of the Bridgeport students lying motionless under a seat. His face was too pale and his wide-open eyes were too void of expression to belong to a living boy, and Don straightway came to the conclusion that he was dead.

"Poor fellow," was his mental comment. "There'll be a sad home somewhere when the particulars of this night's work get into the papers. He doesn't need his musket any more, so I will use it in his stead."

Don secured his musket in time to assist in repulsing every charge the mob made upon the car, and then, like the others, he began firing from the windows. While he was thus engaged one of the lieutenants passed along the aisle, and discovering a student lying prone under a seat, he bent down and looked at him. Like Don, he thought, at first, that the boy was dead; but upon closer examination he found that there was plenty of life in him.

"What are you doing there?" demanded the young officer, indignantly. "Get up and go to work. Where's your gun?"

"Gordon's got it," was the faint reply.

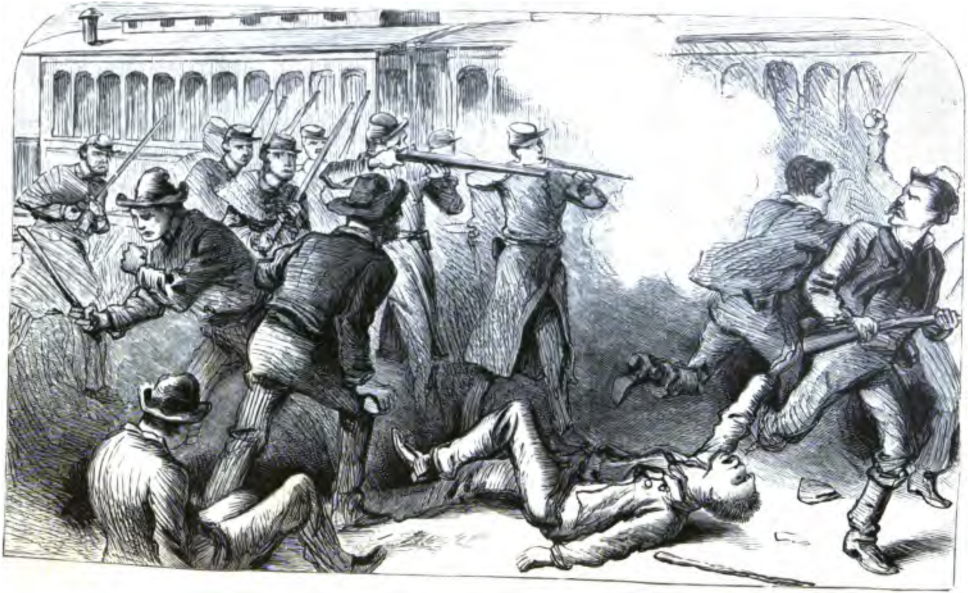
The lieutenant looked around and saw Don in the act of firing his piece out of the window. After he made his shot, the officer asked him whose gun he was using.

"I don't know," answered Don. "I found it on the floor, and thought it might as well take part in this fight as to lie idle there."

"That's all right; but it belongs to this man. Hand it over."

Don was glad to know that his comrade was not injured, but he was reluctant to surrender the musket into the hands of one who had showed no disposition to use it when he had it. He gave it up, however, and then crouched behind a seat and passed out cartridges to Egan and Curtis, who fired as fast as they could load. Both these boys had won the marksman's badge at five hundred yards, and it was not likely that all their shots were thrown away.

About this time report was made that some of the rioters had taken refuge under the car and were shooting up through the floor, and the professor determined to abandon his position. The company was called to attention, Don Gordon opened the door, as we have recorded, and when the order was given they left the car on a run, Don being the fourth to touch the ground. After moving down the track a short distance they came to a halt and faced toward the rioters, who arose from their places of concealment and rushed over the embankment in a body, evidently with the intention of annihilating the students. In fact they told the boys as they came on that they were going to "wipe the last one of 'em out," but they did not do it. The young soldiers were as steady as veterans, and one volley was enough to scatter the rioters, and send them in confusion to their hiding-places. But the students did not escape unscathed. As Don stood there on the track offering a fair target to the rifles of the mob, and unable to fire a single bullet in response to those that whistled about his ears, he heard a suppressed



THE BATTLE WITH THE STRIKERS.

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exclamation from somebody, and turned quickly about to see the boy who stood on his left, bent half double and clasping both his hands around his leg.

"I've got it," said he, as Don sprang to his assistance

"Well, you take it pretty coolly," replied the other. "Come down out of sight. You've no business up here now that you are shot."

After leading his injured comrade to a place of safety behind the embankment, Don returned to the track just in time to receive in his arms the boy who stood on his right and who clapped his hand to his breast and reeled as if he were about to fall. That was the narrowest escape that Don ever had. If he had been in line, where he belonged, the bullet which struck this boy's breastplate and made an ugly wound in his chest, would have hit Don squarely in the side.

The wounded boy had a gun, and Don lost no time in taking possession of it. After seeing that the owner was cared for by some of the unarmed students, Don went back to his place in line, where he remained just long enough to fire one round, when the company was ordered off the track behind the embankment, and an inspection of boxes was held. To their great astonishment the young soldiers found that they had not more than two or three cartridges remaining. As it was impossible for them to hold their ground with so small a supply of ammunition, Mr. Kellogg thought it best to draw off while he could. The wounded were sent to the rear in charge of the boys who had lost their guns in the car, after which the company climbed the fence and struck off through an oat-field toward the road. Seeing this retrograde movement the mob made another charge, but one volley sufficed to check it. If the boys were whipped (as a Hamilton paper, which was cowardly enough to pander to the mob and to extol its heroism afterward declared they were) they did not know it, and neither did the rioters, who took pains after that to keep out of sight. They remained by the car, which they afterward used to carry their wounded to the city, and the students saw them no more that night.

It was during this short halt that Don Gordon, after firing his single round, was approached by Curtis and Egan, one of whom held a musket in each hand, while the other had his fingers tightly clasped around his wrist. The latter was Egan, and his left hand was covered with blood.

"Have you got a spare handkerchief about you, Gordon?" said he. "I'm hit."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Don. "When did you get it?"

"Just now. Curtis had a loud call too," said Egan, nodding toward his friend. "His plume was shot out of his cap."

"Let me look at your hand," said Don, drawing a couple of handkerchiefs from his pocket.

"Oh, there's no artery cut, for the blood comes out in drops and not in jets," answered Egan. "But I am afraid my little finger has gone up. I have bled for my country and you haven't."

"And what's more, I don't want to," said Don.

The latter bandaged the wounded hand as well as he could, and the line moved on across the oat-field. On the way the boy who had been shot through the leg, gave out and had to be carried. The other held up bravely, making frequent and clamorous demands for his gun, and announcing his readiness, severely wounded as he was, to whip the boy who stole it from him. Don kept a still tongue in his head. He had the gun, and being in a better condition to use it than the owner was, he determined to hold fast to it.

When they reached the road they tore a panel or two of the fence to pieces to make a litter for the boy who had given out, and here they were joined by ten or a dozen of their comrades who had left the car by the rear door. By some extraordinary streak of good luck, such as might not have fallen to them again in a thousand years, they had succeeded in escaping the mob and finding refuge in a culvert under the railroad. They brought two wounded boys with them, one of whom had been struck in the eye with a buckshot, while the other had had his scalp laid open by a vicious blow from the butt of a musket as he was jumping from the car.

"When we heard you going across the field we came out," said one of the new-comers, who was delighted to find himself among friends once more. "There were strikers in the culvert, too, but they didn't bother us, for they were as badly frightened as we were. If they had known that there was going to be a fight they wouldn't have come near the bridge. They said so."

"Seen anything of Hop?" asked Don, as soon as he had satisfied himself that his fat friend was not with the party.

"Not lately," was the reply, "but I guess he's all right. The last time I put eyes on him he was going up the track toward Bridgeport, beating the time of Maud S. all to pieces. If he kept on he's at the academy by this time. I always had an idea that I could outrun Hop, but when he passed me I thought I was standing still."

"Were there any strikers after him?"

"There wasn't one in sight. When you fellows in the car got fairly to work, you kept such a fusillade that they were afraid to show their heads."

"By this time the litter was completed, and the wounded boy being placed upon it, the students resumed their march, stopping at the first house they came to, which proved to be a little German inn. The hospitable proprietor gave up his house to them; guards were posted at once; a good Samaritan, who was also a surgeon, promptly made his appearance; the wounded were tenderly cared for; and one of the corporals exchanged his uniform for a citizen's suit, went into the city, reported the fight, and in due time returned with orders for the company to march in and report at the railroad depot.

When morning came the good Samaritan came also, accompanied by a liberal supply of hot coffee and a substantial breakfast, which were served out to the boys while they were sitting in the shade of the trees opposite the inn. The doctor took the wounded home with him to be cared for until they could be sent back to Bridgeport; and the others, having broken their fast, shouldered their guns and set out for Hamilton.

Don Gordon afterward said that his courage had never been so severely tested as it was that morning. On their way to the depot the students passed through the lower portion of the city and through the coal-yards in which the hands had just struck. Thousands of tons of coal were piled on each side of the narrow street, and on the top of these piles stood the striking workmen, who, outnumbering the boys more than twenty to one, and having every advantage of them in position, could have annihilated them in a minute's time if they had made the attempt. It required all the nerve Don possessed to march through there with his eyes straight to the front, and his hair seemed to rise on end whenever he heard one of the men call out to his comrades:

"Thim's the fellers, b'ys. Have a bit of coal at thim."

Some of the men held chunks of coal in their hands, but they did not throw them. No doubt there were those among them who had been in the fight the night before, and who knew that the boys would defend themselves if they were crowded upon. They passed the coal-yards in safety, and marched into the depot, where they found a portion of the 61st under arms, together with several companies of militia, which had been sent there from the neighboring towns. When they stacked arms in the rear of one of the companies which held the left of the line, every boy drew a long breath of relief, and Don hurried off to find a telegraph office.

But little duty was imposed upon the students that day, partly because of their rough experience of the previous night, and partly for the reason that the mob had threatened vengeance upon them—particularly upon Professor Kellogg, who conducted the defence, and upon Captain Mack and the boy with the stained bayonet who had so gallantly defended their leader when the rioters tried to kill him. As one of the students afterward remarked, they loafed about like a lot of tramps, eating and sleeping as they do, and looking quite as dirty. As the hours wore away the mob began gathering in front of the depot, and once when Don looked out, he could see nothing but heads as far as his eyes could reach. There were between eight and ten thousand of them, and opposed to them there were less than three hundred muskets. They were kept in check by double lines of sentries which they could have swept away like chaff if they had possessed the courage to attempt it.

With the night came more excitement. Reinforcements began to arrive. Squads of men who had been sent off on detached duty came in, followed by strong delegations from the Grand Army. There were three false alarms, the last of which created some confusion. Some uneasy sleeper, while rolling about on his hard bed, managed to kick over a stack of muskets. One of them, which its careless owner had not left at a half-cock, as he ought to have done, exploded with a ringing report that brought the different companies to their feet and into the ranks in short order. The company that created the confusion was stationed directly in front of the Bridgeport boys. Some of its members, believing that the mob was upon them, ran for dear life, deserting their arms and rushing pell-mell through the ranks of the students, knocking them out of their places as fast as they could get into them.

This was an opportunity that was too good to be lost. Here were guns, scattered about over the floor, and no one to use them. To snatch them up and remove and throw away the slings that belonged to them, thus making their identification a matter of impossibility, was the work of but a few seconds. Will Hovey was the one who set the example, others were quick to follow it, and no one noticed what they were doing. When order had been restored and the ranks formed, there were eight men in one company who could not find their weapons, and as many boys in another who held in their hands muskets that did not belong to them.

"Humph!" said Don to himself. "If our company gets into another tight place, I hope we shall have somebody besides these men to back us. They are very pretty fellows, well up in the school of the company, and all that, but they don't seem to have much pluck."

The night passed without further trouble, the forenoon came and went, and at three o'clock the 49th, of Auburn, came in. The train that brought them to the city was stopped by the strikers, who refused to allow it to go any further. The colonel said he didn't care—that he had just as soon walk as ride—and ordered his men to disembark.

If the rioters had never before been fully satisfied that their day was passed, they must have seen it now. Instead of one company there were several that got out of the cars—four hundred and ninety men, in fact, who stood there with their bayonets fixed and their pieces loaded, all ready for a fight if the rioters wanted it. But they didn't. Having been so severely handled by only seventeen boys, that they dared not pursue them when they left the field, it was not likely that they were anxious for a collision with this splendid body of men, many of whom were veterans. The leaders held a consultation, and seeing that they could not help themselves, they finally concluded that the regiment might proceed.

A short time after it came into the depot, the Bridgeport boys and two other companies marched out, directing their course toward the Arsenal, which was located on one of Hamilton's principal business streets. Now came another test of their courage. The sound of the drums served as a signal to the mob, which congregated in immense numbers, and marched with the troops to their destination. Some of them carried clubs and stones in their hands, and loud threats were made against the students, who were repeatedly assured that not one of them would ever leave the city alive. If they had been alone they would probably have had another fight on their hands; but they had a hundred and sixty men to back them, and that number, added to their own, made a larger force than the mob cared to face in battle.

They took supper at the Arsenal, where they remained until midnight, when they were ordered to fall in without the least noise. They obeyed, lost in wonder, leaving the drill-room so silently that the men who were slumbering on each side of them did not know they were gone until daylight came to reveal the fact, and when they reached the gate they found an immense police-van waiting for them. Into this they crowded and were driven slowly up the street, Professor Kellogg and Captain Mack going on ahead to see that the way was clear.

"Where are you taking us?" whispered Don to the driver.

"To the Penitentiary," was the guarded response.

"Going to lock us up there?"

"Yes, sir; the last one of you."

"What for?"

"To punish you for shooting at the mob last night."

"They'll give us plenty to eat, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes; all you want."

"Do they look for any trouble among the prisoners?"

"I think so; at any rate you are sent up there at the mayor's request. He said he wanted men there who were not afraid to shoot, and such men he wanted well fed."

This was a compliment to the company, and a decided indorsement of the manner in which they had conducted themselves during the fight with the mob. To quote from some of the members, they had a "soft thing" while they remained at the Penitentiary. There were about four hundred convicts there, but they knew better than to attempt an outbreak, and all the boys had to do was to keep themselves clean, eat, sleep, and stand guard. Having made themselves famous they received many calls during their two days' stay at the prison, and these visitors did not come empty-handed. The stockings, handkerchiefs, collars, lemons and other needful things they were thoughtful enough to bring with them, were gratefully accepted by the young soldiers, who begged for papers, and wanted to know all that was going on outside. They were gratified to learn that the back-bone of the riot was broken; that the strikers were anxious to go to work; that trains were running on some of the roads; and that the hour of their release was close at hand.

It came early on Saturday morning, when they were ordered to draw cartridges and fall in for a march to the skating-rink, which was now used as military headquarters, and which they reached without any mishap, the streets being free from any thing that looked like a mob. As they marched into the rink a soldier called out: "Three cheers for the Bridgeport boys!" and the lusty manner in which they were given proved that their comrades were entirely satisfied with what they had done.

Their departure from Hamilton, which was ordered at eleven o'clock, was in keeping with the treatment they had received from all the officers and military during their entire stay. They were escorted to the depot by two companies, which formed in line and saluted them as they passed by. After taking leave of many new-made friends they boarded the car which had been set apart for them (it was guarded at both doors this time, although there was no necessity for it) and were whirled away toward home, their journey being enlivened by songs, speeches and cheers for everybody who had borne his part in the fight. When the whistle sounded for Bridgeport one of the students thrust his head out of a window, but almost instantly pulled it back again to exclaim:

"Great Moses! What a crowd!"

But it was one the boys were not afraid of. As soon as the train came to a stand-still they left the car, and marching in columns of fours, moved through long lines of firemen and students who had assembled to welcome them home, the firemen standing with uncovered heads and the students presenting arms. The cross-roads, as well as the roads leading from the depot to the village, were crowded with carriages, all filled to their utmost capacity with ladies and gentlemen, who waved their handkerchiefs and hats, and greeted them with every demonstration of delight.

"Halt here, captain," said the marshal of the day, when the boys reached the head of the line.

"Where's Professor Kellogg?" asked Mack, looking around.

"I don't know. Halt here, and come to a left face."

When the order was obeyed, the spokesman of a committee of reception, which had been appointed by the citizens, mounted upon a chair and took off his hat; whereupon Captain Mack brought his men to parade rest to listen to his speech. It was short but eloquent, and went straight to the hearts of those to whom it was addressed, with the exception, perhaps, of Captain Mack. He knew that somebody would be expected to respond, and while he pretended to be listening with all his ears, he was looking nervously around to find Mr. Kellogg. But that gentleman was seated in the superintendent's carriage a little distance away, looking serenely on, and Mack was left to his own resources, which, so far as speech-making was concerned, were few indeed. When the speaker had complimented them in well-chosen words for the gallantry they had displayed in the fight, and told them how proud his fellow-citizens were to say that the company that struck the first blow in defence of law and order in Hamilton came from their little town, he got down from his chair, and everybody looked at Captain Mack.

The young officer blushed like a girl as he stepped out of the ranks with his cap in his hand. He managed to make those of the crowd who could hear him understand that he and his company were much gratified by their reception, which was something they had not dreamed of, and delighted to know that their conduct as soldiers was approved by their friends at home; and then, not knowing what else to say, he broke out with—

"I can't make a speech, gentlemen of the committee, but my boys can holler, and I'll prove it. Three cheers and a tiger for the gentleman who has so cordially greeted us, for the other gentlemen composing the committee, and for every man, woman and *baby* who has come out to welcome us home."

The cheers were given with a will, and the citizens replied with "three times three." When the band struck up, the line was formed under direction of the marshal and moved toward the park. The church bells were rung, the solitary field-piece of which the village could boast, and which was brought out only on state occasions, thundered out a greeting every minute, and the crowds that met them at every turn cheered themselves hoarse. Mottoes and bunting were lavishly displayed, and Main-street was spanned by two large flags, to which was attached a white banner having an inscription that sent a thrill of pride to the breasts of the boys, who now read it for the first time—

"WELCOME!

We honor those who do their duty."

On arriving at the park the arms were stacked, the ranks broken, and fifteen minutes were taken for hand-shaking; and cordial as the formal reception was, it bore no comparison to the hearty personal welcome that was extended to each and every one of the third company boys, who never knew until that moment how many warm friends they had in Bridgeport. Among those who came up to shake hands with Don Gordon and Curtis was a fellow who was dressed in the academy uniform, who walked with a cane and wore a slipper on his left foot. It was Courtland Hopkins.

CHAPTER XI.

HOPKINS'S EXPERIENCE.

"BOYS, I am delighted to see you home again, safe and sound," said Hopkins, putting his cane under his arm and shaking hands with both his friends at once. "I tell you we have been troubled about you, for some of us who returned the second day after the fight, heard the rioters say that you would never leave the city alive."

"We heard them say so, too," replied Curtis. "But we're here all the same. Hallo, Bert. And there's Egan. How's your hand, old fellow? Lost that little finger yet?"

"No; and I don't think I'll have to. Why didn't you let us know that you were coming?"

"You did know it, or else you couldn't have met us at the depot," answered Don, after he had returned his brother's greeting.

"I mean that you ought to have sent us word this morning," said Egan. "The ladies would have got up a good supper for you if they had had time to do it."

"We should have done full justice to it, for we had an early breakfast and no dinner," Curtis remarked. "But you have not yet told us what is the matter with you, Hop. I hope you were not shot."

"Oh, no. It is nothing more serious than a sprained ankle," replied Hopkins.

"And 'thereby hangs a tale,'" added Egan. "I'll tell you all about it when we get up to the academy. Hop showed himself a hero if he did run out of the back door."

"How did you get back to Bridgeport?" inquired Don.

"I went home with the doctor on the morning that you fellows started for Hamilton, you know," replied Egan. "Well, as soon as he had dressed my hand and the wounds of some of the other boys who were able to walk, we went up the track to the next station, and there we telegraphed for a carriage. To tell the truth I never expected to get home, for the rioters were scouring the country in search of us. We heard of them at every house along the road, and everybody cautioned us to look out for ourselves."

During a hurried conversation with their friends, Don and Curtis learned that the people of Bridgeport knew as much about the fight as they did themselves. Perhaps they knew more, for they had heard both sides of the story. The students who came home the day after the fight—the missing ones had all reported with the exception of three, whose wounds were so severe that they could not be brought from the city—had given a correct version of the affair and described the part that every boy took in it. All those who had done their duty like men were known to the citizens, and so were those who gave up their guns when the strikers demanded them. The boys who did the fighting, however, had not a word to say regarding the behavior of their timid comrades. They had an abundance of charity for them.

"We don't blame them for being frightened," Don and Curtis often said. "There isn't a boy in the company who wouldn't have been glad to get out of that car if he could. When you have been placed in just such a situation yourselves, you will know how we felt; until then, you have no business to sit in judgment upon those who are said to have shown the white feather."

The fifteen minutes allotted for hand-shaking having expired, the students fell in and set out for the academy. As they marched through the gate the bell in the cupola rung out a joyful greeting, the artillery saluted them, and the boys in the first, second and fourth companies presented arms. They moved at once to the armory, and after listening to a stirring speech from the superintendent the ranks were broken, and their campaign against the Hamilton rioters was happily ended.

"And I, for one, never want to engage in another," said Captain Mack, as he and Don and Curtis set out in search of Egan and Hopkins. "Have you heard some of the fellows say that they wish they had been there?"

Yes, they and all the returned soldiers had heard a good deal of such talk from boys who would have died before giving up their guns, and who were loud in their criticisms of Mr. Kellogg, who ought to have stopped the train at least half a mile from the mob, and fired upon it the moment it appeared. What a chance this would have been for Lester Brigham, if he had only been in a situation to improve it! If he had never known before that he made a great mistake by feigning illness on the night the false alarm was sounded, he knew it now. He could not conceal the disgust he felt whenever he saw a third-company boy surrounded by friends who were listening eagerly to his description of the fight. Such sights as these made him all the more determined to get away from the academy where he had always been kept in the background in spite of his efforts to push himself to the front. And worse than all, there was Don Gordon, who had come home with the marks of a rioter's knife on his coat and belt, who had behaved with the coolness of a veteran, and showed no more fear than he would have exhibited if he had been engaged in a game of snow-ball.

"I'll bet he was under a seat more than half the time, and that nobody noticed him," said Lester, spitefully.

"Oh, I guess not," said Jones. "Gordon isn't that sort of a fellow. Well, they have had their fun, and ours is yet to come. There will be a jolly lot of us sent down at the end of the term. What do you suppose your governor will say to you?"

"Not a word," replied Lester, confidently. "He didn't send me here to risk life and limb by fighting strikers who have done nothing to me, and when he gets the letters I have written him, he will tell me to start for home at once."

"But you'll not go?" said Jones.

"Not until we have had our picnic," replied Lester.

"Perhaps your father won't care to have Jones and me visit you," remarked Enoch.

"Oh, yes he will. He told me particularly to invite a lot of good fellows home with me, and he will give you a cordial welcome. I haven't got a shooting-box, but I own a nice tent, and that will do just as well. I will show you some duck-shooting that will make you open your eyes."

"All right," said Enoch. "I'll go, according to promise, and you must be sure and visit me in my Maryland home next year. Both the Gordons and Curtis will visit Egan at that time, and unless I am much mistaken, we can make things lively for them."

"Nothing would suit me better," returned Lester. "I hate all that crowd. Don and Bert went back on me as soon as they got me here, and I'll never rest easy until I get a chance to square yards with them."

(Lester learned this from Enoch. He remembered all the nautical expressions he heard, and used them as often as he could, and sometimes without the least regard for the fitness of things. He hoped in this way to make his companions believe that he was a sailor, and competent to command the yacht during their proposed cruise.)

The conversation just recorded will make it plain to the reader that Lester and some of his particular friends, following in the lead of Don and Bert Gordon and *their* friends, had made arrangements to spend a portion of their vacation in visiting one another. They carried out their plans, too, and perhaps we shall see what came of it.

When Mack and the rest found Hopkins and Egan, they went up to the latter's room, where they thought they would be allowed to talk in peace; but some of the students saw them go in there, and in less time than it takes to write it, the little dormitory was packed until standing-room was at a premium. The boys were full of questions. What one did not think of another did, and it was a long time before Don could say a word about Hopkins's experience, which Egan related substantially as follows:

To begin with, Hopkins did not leave the car because he wanted to, but because he couldn't help himself. When the rioters voted to disarm the young soldiers, half a dozen pairs of ready hands were laid upon his musket, but Hopkins wouldn't give it up. Threats, and the sight of the revolvers and knives that were brandished before his face, had no effect upon him; but he could not contend against such overwhelming odds, with the least hope of success. He was jerked out into the aisle in spite of all he could do to prevent it, and dragged toward the door. When the students turned their bayonets and the butts of their pieces against their assailants, the latter made a frantic rush for the door, and Hopkins was wedged in so tightly among them, that he could not get out. His gun was pulled from his grasp, and Hopkins, finding his hands at liberty, seized the arm of the nearest seat in the hope of holding himself there until the mob had passed out of the car; but the pressure from the forward end was too great for his strength. He lost his hold, was carried out of the door by the rush of the rioters, who, intent on saving themselves, took no notice of him, and crowded him off the platform.

"But before I went, I was an eye-witness to a little episode in which our friend Egan bore a part, and which he seems inclined to omit," interrupted Hopkins.

"Now, Hop, I've got the floor," exclaimed Egan, who was lying at his ease on his room-mate's bed.

"I don't care if you have. There's no gag-law here."

"Go on, Hop," shouted the boys.

"It will take me but a moment," said Hopkins, while Egan settled his uninjured hand under his head with a sigh of resignation. "When the mob went to work to disarm us, one big fellow stepped up to Egan and took hold of his gun. 'Lave me this; I'm Oirish,' said he. 'I'm Irish too,' said Egan. 'Take that with me compliments and lave me the gun;' and he hit the striker a blow in the face that lifted him from his feet and would have knocked him out of the front door, if there hadn't been so many men and boys in the way. That fellow must have thought he had been kicked by a mule. At any rate he did not come back after the gun, and Egan was one of the few who got out of the car as fully armed as he was when he went in."

Hopkins could be irresistibly comical when he tried, and his auditors shouted until the room rang again. They knew that his story was exaggerated, but it amused them all the same. Egan *did* say that he was Irish (Hopkins often told him that if he ever denied his nationality his name would betray him), and it was equally true that he floored the man who demanded his gun, and with him one or two of his own company boys who happened to be in the way; but he said nothing about "compliments," nor did he imitate the striker's way of talking. Among those who felt some of the force of that blow, was Captain Mack.

"That explains how I got knocked down," said he. "The rioters were trying to drag the professor out of the car, and we were doing all we could to protect him, when all at once some heavy body took me in the back, and the first thing I knew I was sprawling on the floor. I thought I should be trampled to death before I could get up."

When Hopkins struck the ground he stood still and waited for some of the mob to come and knock him on the head; but seeing that they were looking out for themselves, and that some of his comrades were making good time up the track in the direction of Bridgeport, he started too, doing much better running than he did when he stole farmer Hudson's jar of buttermilk, and passing several of the company who were in full flight. The bullets sang about his ears and knocked up the dirt before and behind him, and Hopkins began looking about for a place of concealment. Seeing that some of his company ran down from the track and disappeared very suddenly when they reached a certain point a short distance in advance of him, Hopkins stopped to investigate. He found that they had sought refuge in a culvert, which afforded them secure protection from the bullets; but Hopkins was inclined to believe that in fleeing from one danger they had run plump into another. There were strikers as well as students in there; and as he halted at the mouth of the culvert he heard a hoarse voice say:

"You soldier boys had better not stop here. You have made the mob mad, and as soon as they get through with those fellows in the car, they are going to spread themselves through the country and make an end of everybody who wears the academy uniform. I heard some of them say so, and I am talking for your good."

"And I will act upon your advice," said Hopkins to himself. "It is a dangerous piece of business to go along that railroad-track, but I don't see how I am going to help it."

It proved to be a more dangerous undertaking than the boy thought it was. Death by the bullets which constantly whistled over the track, was not the only peril that threatened him now. Believing that the main body of their forces could keep the professor and his handful of students in the car until their cartridges were expended, after which it would be an easy matter to drag them out and hang them as they fully meant to do, the rioters had sent off a strong detachment to look after the boys who had escaped from the rear of the car. Hopkins could see them running through the fields with the intention of getting ahead of the fugitives and surrounding them.

"That's a very neat plan, but I don't think it will work," said Hopkins, as he drew himself together and prepared for another foot-race. "I wish I had known this before I left the culvert so that I could have told—I'll go back and tell them if I lose my only chance for escape by it."

Hopkins turned quickly about, but saw at a glance that there was no need that he should waste valuable time by going back to the culvert. The boys were leaving it in a body and making their way across a field. They were going to join their comrades who had left the car, but Hopkins did not know it, for he could not see the company, it being concealed from his view by some thick bushes which grew on that side of the track.

"They're all right," said Hopkins, "but it seems to me they are taking a queer way to get home. I'll stick to the track, because it leads to Bridgeport by the most direct route. Now then for a run! Hallo, here! What's the matter with you, Stanley?"

While Hopkins was talking in this way to himself, he was flying up the track at a rate of speed which promised to leave the fleetest of the flanking party far behind; but before he had run a hundred yards, he came upon a student who was sitting on the end of one of the ties with his head resting on his hands. As Hopkins drew nearer he saw that the boy had bound his handkerchief around his leg just above his knee, and that it was stained with blood.

"What's the matter?" repeated Hopkins.

"I'm shot and can't go any farther," was the faint reply.

"When did you get it?"

"Just as I jumped from the car."

"Well, get up and try again. You must go on, for if you stay here you are done for. Look there," said Hopkins, directing the boy's attention to the rioters who were trying to surround them.

"I can't help it. I ran till I dropped, and I couldn't do more, could I? I am afraid my leg is broken. Take care of yourself."

"I will, and of you, too," replied Hopkins. "Get up. Now balance yourself on one foot, throw your arms over my shoulders and I will carry you."

The wounded boy, who had given up in despair, began to take heart now. He did just as Hopkins told him, and the former walked off with him on his back as if his weight were no incumbrance whatever. He did not run, but he moved with a long, swinging stride which carried him and his burden over the ground as fast as most boys would care to walk with no load at all. The mob followed them until they came to the creek which was too wide to jump and too deep to ford, and there they abandoned the pursuit. At all events Hopkins and Stanley saw no more of them that night.

"Look out," said Stanley, suddenly. "There's one of them right ahead of us."

Hopkins looked up and saw a man standing on the track. The manner of his appearance seemed to indicate that he had been hidden in the bushes awaiting their approach.

"You had better put me down and save yourself," whispered Stanley, as Hopkins came to a halt wondering what he was going to do now. "If you get into a fight with him I can't help you."

"I didn't pick you up to drop you again at the first sign of danger," was the determined reply. "I wish I had a club or a stone. You don't see one anywhere, do you?"

"Say, boss," said the man, in guarded tones.

"Bully for him; he's a darkey," exclaimed Hopkins. "We have nothing to fear."

"Say, boss," said the man again, as he came down the track, "Ise a friend. Don't shoot."

"All right, uncle. Come on."

"What's de matter wid you two?"

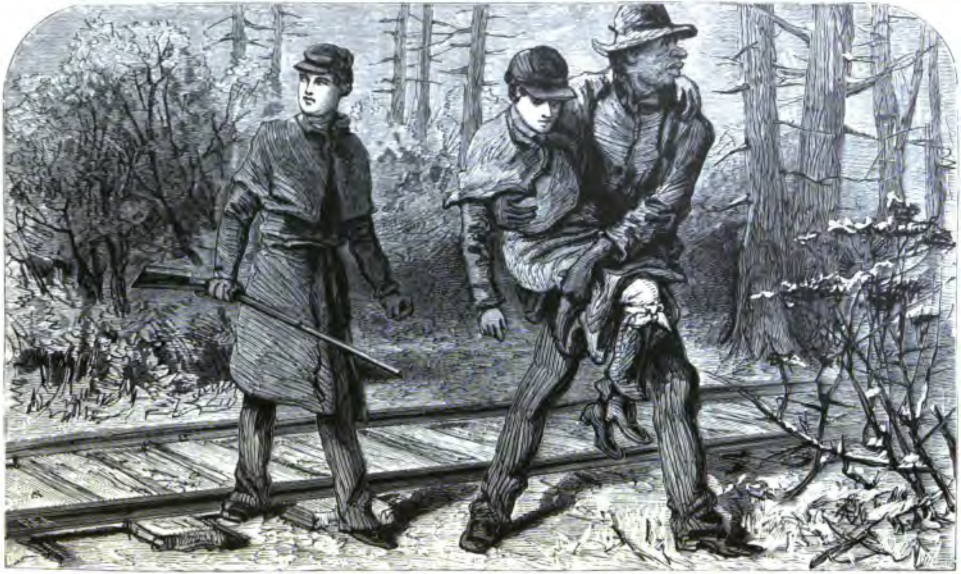
"There's nothing the matter with me," answered Hopkins, "but this boy is shot. Can you do anything for him?"

"Kin I do sumpin fur de soldiers?" exclaimed the negro. "'Course I kin, kase didn't dey do a heap fur me when de wah was here? I reckon mebbe I'd best take him down to de house whar de women folks is."

"Handle him carefully," said Hopkins. "He's got a bad leg."

The negro, who was a giant in strength as well as stature, raised the wounded boy in his arms as easily as if he had been an infant, and carried him up the track until he came to a road which led back into the woods where his cabin was situated. Here they found several colored people of both sexes who had gathered for mutual protection, and who greeted the boys with loud exclamations of wonder and sympathy.

"Hush yer noise dar," commanded the giant, who answered to the name of Robinson. "Don't yer know dat dem strikers is all fru de country, an' dat some of 'em was hyar not mor'n ten minutes ago?"



"A Friend in need is a Friend indeed."

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ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R L

"Not here at this house?" exclaimed Hopkins, in alarm.

Yes, they had been there at the house, and in it and all over it, so Robinson said, looking for the boys who had escaped by the rear door. They might return at any moment, but he (Robinson) would do the best he could for them. He couldn't fight the mob, as he would like to, but perhaps he could keep the boys concealed.

"What do you think they would do with us if they found us?" inquired Stanley.

Robinson couldn't say for certain, but the men who came to his house were angry enough to do almost anything. They were all armed, and some of them carried ropes in their hands. This proved that their threat to hang the young soldiers was no idle one.

The first thing Robinson did was to look at Stanley's wound. A bullet had plowed a furrow through the back of his leg just below his knee, and although the artery had not been cut and the bone was uninjured, everybody saw at a glance that it was impossible for him to go any farther. Hopkins inquired where he could find a surgeon, but the negro wouldn't tell him, declaring that if he set out in search of one he would never see his friends again.

While Hopkins was trying to make up his mind what he ought to do, he suddenly became aware that there was something the matter with himself. One of his boots seemed to be growing tighter, and he limped painfully when he tried to walk across the floor.

"I declare, I believe I have sprained my ankle," said he; and an examination proved that he had. His ankle was badly swollen and inflamed, and after he took his boot off he could not bear the weight of his foot upon the floor.

"I reckon you'ns has got to put up at my hotel dis night, bofe of you," said Robinson. "You can't go no furder, dat's sho'."

"Perhaps you had better let us lie out in the woods," said Hopkins. "If the strikers should return and find us here, they might do you some injury."

The negro said he didn't care for that. Soldiers had more than once put themselves in danger for him, and it was a pity if he couldn't do something for them. At any rate he would take the risk. He bustled about at a lively rate while he was talking, and in five minutes more the disabled boys had been carried up the ladder that led to the loft and stored away there on some hay that had been provided for them. After that Stanley's leg was dressed with cold coffee, which Robinson declared to be the best thing in the world for gun-shot wounds. Hopkins's ankle was bound up in cloths wet with hot water, a plain but bountiful supper was served up to them, and they were left to their meditations. Of course they did not sleep much, for they couldn't. They suffered a good deal of pain, but not a word of complaint was heard from either of them. Hopkins acted as nurse during the night, and shortly after daylight sunk into an uneasy slumber, from which he was aroused by a gentle push from Stanley, who shook his finger at him to keep him quiet.

"They've come," whispered his companion.

"They! Who?" said Hopkins, starting up.

"The mob. Don't you hear them?"

Hopkins listened, and his hair seemed to rise on end when he caught the low hum of conversation outside, which grew louder and more distinct as a party of men approached the house. Enjoining silence upon his companion Hopkins drew himself slowly and painfully over the hay to the end of the loft, and looked out of a convenient knot hole. Stanley, who watched all his movements with the keenest interest, trembled all over when Hopkins held up all his fingers to indicate that there were ten of them. He also made other motions signifying that the rioters were armed and that they had brought ropes with them. Just then there was a movement in the room below, and Robinson opened the door and stepped out to wait the mob.

"Say, nigger," exclaimed one of the leaders, "where are those boys who were here last night?"

Robinson replied that he didn't know where they were. They had been taken to the city early that morning, and he thought they were in the hospital.

"Were they both hurt?" asked one of the rioters.

"Yes; one had a bullet through his leg, and the other had been shot in the foot."

"We wish those bullets had been through their heads," said the leader. "It's well for them that they got away, for we came here on purpose to hang them."

"Dat would serve 'em just right," said Robinson. "Dey ain't got no call to come down hyar an' go to foolin' wid de workin' man when he wants his bread an' butter. No, sar, dey ain't."

The boys in the loft awaited the result of this conference with fear and trembling. They fully expected that the rioters would search the house and drag them from their place of concealment, but the negro answered all their questions so readily and appeared to be so frank and truthful, that their suspicions were not aroused. When Stanley, who kept a close watch of his friend, saw him kiss his hand toward the knot-hole, he drew a long breath of relief, for he knew that the rioters were going away.

This visit satisfied both them and their sable host that they were not safe there, and Robinson at once sent his oldest boy to the nearest farmhouse to borrow a horse and wagon. When the vehicle arrived the boys were put into it, and Robinson took the reins and drove away with all the speed he could induce the horse to put forth.

"How do you suppose those men knew that we were at your house?" said Hopkins.

"One of dem no account niggers dat was dar las' night done went an' tol' 'em," replied Robinson, angrily. "I'll jest keep my eye peeled fur dat feller, an' when I find him, I'll make him think he's done been struck by lightnin'. I will so."

Robinson took the boys to the house of the nearest surgeon, who received and treated them with the greatest kindness and hospitality. As Hopkins and Stanley were boys who never spent their money foolishly they always had plenty of it, and consequently they were able to bestow a liberal reward upon the negro, who volunteered to drive to the nearest station and sent off a despatch for them. The next day a carriage arrived from Bridgeport and Hopkins went home in it, but Stanley, much to his regret, was ordered to remain behind, the surgeon refusing to consent to his removal; but he could not have been in pleasanter quarters or under better care.

There were half a dozen other boys in the room who told stories of escapes that were fully as interesting as this one. They could have talked all night, but the supper-call sounded, and that broke up the meeting.

CHAPTER XII.

PLANS AND ARRANGEMENTS.

"I SAY, fellows," exclaimed Egan, the next time he found all his friends together, "there's something going to happen during this camp that never happened before. The paymaster is coming here to settle with us."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that we are entitled to a dollar a day for the work our company did at Hamilton," replied Egan. "As we were under orders five days we have five dollars apiece coming to us from the State."

"Do the wounded come in for that much?" inquired Hopkins.

"They belong to the company, do they not?" demanded Egan. "They are not to blame for getting hurt, are they? They will get just as much as the others."

We may here remark that the Legislature gave them more. Hopkins received a hundred dollars to pay him for his sprained ankle; the boy who was hit in the eye with a buckshot, and who stood a fair chance of going blind from the effects of it, got eleven hundred; Stanley received six hundred, and so did each of the boys who were shot at Don Gordon's side when the company was ordered out of the car.

"I'll never spend those five dollars," said Don.

"Neither will I," chimed in Hopkins. "If I get the money all in one bill, I'll have it framed and hang it up in my room beside a fox-brush which I won at the risk of my neck."

"I wonder how mine would look hung around the neck of that white swan that led me such a race two winters ago," said Egan. "I think they will go well together, and every time I look at them, they will remind me of the most exciting incident of my life. Gordon, you'll have to make yours into a rug and spread it on the floor beside the skin of that bear that came so near making an end of Lester Brigham."

The boys had only three days more to devote to study during the school term, and much lost time to make up. The work was hard, they found it almost impossible to keep their minds upon their books, and everybody, teachers as well as students, was glad when the first day of August arrived, and the battalion took up its line of march for its old camping ground. The students were hardly allowed time to become settled in their new quarters before their friends began to flock into the camp. A few fathers and guardians came there with the intention of taking their sons and wards from the school at once—they did not want them to remain if they were expected to risk their lives in fighting rioters. Some of the timid ones were glad to go ; but the others, who were full of military ardor, begged hard to be permitted to complete the course, and pleaded their cause with so much ability that their fathers relented, and even took the trouble to hunt up Professor Kellogg and congratulate him on having "broken the backbone" of the Hamilton riot.

Lester Brigham's father and mother were among the visitors, and so were General Gordon and his wife. The former were very indignant when they left Rochdale. Mr. Brigham repeatedly declaring that it was a sin and an outrage for the superintendent to send boys like those under his care into battle, and after he had told him, in plain language, what he thought of such a proceeding, he was going to take Lester out of that school without any delay or ceremony. But when he reached the camp, he did not feel that way. General Gordon reasoned with him, and when he shook hands with Lester, he said he was sorry the boy hadn't been in the fight, so that he could praise him for his gallant conduct. Mr. Brigham didn't know that Lester had hidden his head under the bedclothes when the bugle sounded.

"I was afraid you would want me to leave the school," faltered Lester, as soon as he had somewhat recovered from his surprise.

"By no means," said his father, earnestly. "You boys will have full control of this government some day—did you ever think of that?—and now is the time for you to learn your duty as citizens. What are you going to be when this examination comes off? A captain, I hope."

"I shan't be anything," replied Lester, who could scarcely conceal his rage. "I shall never be an officer, because I can't see the beauty of toadying to the teachers. I'll not stay here to fight strikers, either."

"I sincerely hope your company will never be called upon to perform any duty so hazardous," said Mr. Brigham; "but if it is, I want to hear that you are in the front rank. If you do not obtain promotion this examination, I shall think you have wasted your time."

"I have invited a couple of my friends to go home with me," said Lester, who wanted to make sure of a cordial reception for Jones and Williams, even if he and they were expelled from the academy for misconduct.

"I am glad to hear it," said Mr. Brigham. "Your mother and I will endeavor to make their visit so agreeable that they will want to come again."

"And Williams has invited me to go home with him next year," added Lester. "He lives down in Maryland, a short distance from Egan and Hopkins. May I go?"

"Certainly. Make all the friends you can, but be sure that they are the right sort."

"I've got his promise," said Lester to himself, as he paced his lonely beat that night, "and he'll not break it. But I must say he's a nice father for any fellow to have. I thought sure he had come here to take me home with him. He talks very glibly about my risking life and limb in defence of law and order, but would he take it so easy if he were in my place? I'll not stay here another year, and that's flat."

Contrary to his expectations Lester Brigham, although he fell far behind his class in both deportment and studies, had not been left at the academy under arrest, and now he was glad of it. It was easier to get out of the camp than it was to leave the academy grounds, and he and his fellow-conspirators could hold a consultation every day. They began to exhibit some activity now, and among those who had agreed to accompany Lester on his "picnic" there was not one who showed any signs of backing out, or who even thought of it, with the exception of Lester himself. Three of their number had been taken home by their angry parents, but those who remained held to their purpose, and urged their leaders to decide upon a plan of operations. Lester, who had been rendered almost desperate by the extraordinary behavior of his father, was anxious that something should be done at once, and he and his two right-hand men had many an earnest conference, the result of which was the promulgation of an order to the effect that none of the "band," as they called themselves, should ask for a pass until they were told to do so.

"That will keep us together, you know," said Lester and his lieutenants. "If one of us asks for a pass to-day and another to-morrow—why, when the time for action comes those who have already been out will be refused, and consequently not more than half of us will get away. Williams will have to go out to do a little scouting so as to ascertain when and where we can get a boat, but the rest of us must be content to stay in."

Their first week under canvas was a busy one, as it always was. The fortifications, which had been thrown up the year before in anticipation of that fight with the Mount Pleasant Indians, must be repaired and camp routine established before liberty was granted to anybody. Before this work was completed many of their visitors took their departure. Among these were General and Mrs. Gordon, who wished Don and Bert a pleasant visit with their friend Curtis in his northern home, and Lester's father and mother, who did not forget to give the boy a good supply of spending money before they went, and to assure Jones and Williams that they looked forward to their visit to Rochdale with many pleasurable anticipations.

"That money is intended for the use of yourself and your friends," said Mr. Brigham. "If it is stolen from you, or if the superintendent finds out that I gave it to you, it will be your own fault. If you will come home with a strap on your shoulder, I will give you as much more."

During the second week passes were freely granted, and one of the first to go out was Enoch Williams, whose duty it was to find a suitable boat and lay plans for seizing it at a specified time. He was gone all day, and when he came back he was full of enthusiasm, some of which he communicated to Jones, who was the first boy he met after reporting his return. They exchanged a few whispered words, and then hurried off to find Lester.

"It's all right, Brigham," said Jones, gleefully. "Enoch has done his full duty, and deserves the thanks of every fellow in the band. We're off to-morrow night."

Somehow Lester did not feel as highly elated over this piece of news as his friends thought he would. He wanted to desert and do something that would make the academy boys talk about him after he was gone, but he wished from the bottom of his heart that he had never said a word about running away in a boat.

"I think myself that I have planned things better than any other boy in the band could have done it," said Enoch, with no little satisfaction in his tones. "I've got the boat, and now you must assess every fellow in the band five dollars."

"What for?" demanded Lester.

"To pay for her, and to buy our provisions."

"To pay for her," echoed Lester. "I thought we were going to steal her."

"So we are—after a while. Now I will begin at the beginning and tell you just what I have done: When I got down to the river I found that the cutter I wanted to take on account of her superior accommodations, had gone off on a cruise, and that there was only one yacht in port. But she's a beauty, and I wouldn't be afraid to go to Europe in her. She was anchored out in the stream, and while I was wondering how I could get aboard of her, her keeper came off in a dory and told me that if I wanted to take a look at the schooner he would be glad of my company, for he was alone there. I went, and in less than an hour I had everything arranged. His owner is going on a cruise with a party of friends next Monday, and it took but little urging on my part to induce the keeper to agree to give the band a ride down the river to-morrow night, provided we would promise to come back when he said the word, so that he could have the schooner in her berth at daylight."

"You didn't promise that, of course," said Lester, when Enoch paused to take breath.

"Of course I did," answered Enoch.

"Well, you're a good one," exclaimed Lester, in deep disgust. "I'll not go on any such expedition. A night ride on the river! There would be lots of fun in that, wouldn't there? When I start on this picnic I don't intend to come back to Bridgeport until I have had sport enough to pay me for the trouble of deserting, or I am captured and brought back."

"Neither do we," said Jones, as soon as he saw a chance to crowd a word in edgewise. "Let Enoch finish his story, and then see if you don't think more of his plans."

"I promised that he could come back with his vessel before daylight, so that his owner wouldn't suspect that he had been doing a little cruising on his own hook," continued Enoch, "but I didn't say that we would come back with him."

"You might as well have said so," snapped Lester. "Where are we going to stay and what are we going to do without a boat to sail about in?"

"Wait until I have had my say, and then you may talk yourself blind for all I care," retorted Enoch, who was beginning to get angry.

"Go easy, Williams," Jones interposed. "We don't want a row before we get out of camp. If we go to quarreling among ourselves there's an end of all our fun."

"I don't want to quarrel," said Lester, who did not like the way Enoch glared at him.

"Then wait till I get through before you pass judgment upon the arrangements I have made," exclaimed Enoch. "I didn't promise Coleman—that's the boat-keeper's name—that we would return to Bridgeport with him, and neither did I say that he could bring the yacht back, for I don't intend that he shall do anything of the kind."

"How are you going to prevent it?" inquired Lester.

"That's the best part of the plan," said Jones. "Go on, Enoch."

"This is the way we will prevent it," continued the latter. "We'll go with him as far as Windsor, and then we will stop and make an excuse to get him ashore. As soon as we are rid of him we'll fill away for the bay. If the wind is at all brisk he can't catch us."

"What do you say to that?" demanded Jones.

"I say it looks like business," answered Lester, who now, for the first time, began to take some interest in his scheme. "It's all right, Enoch; you couldn't have done better, and I couldn't have done as well. There's my hand."

"I thought you would like it after you had given me a chance to explain," said Enoch, growing good-natured again.

"So did I," chimed in Jones. "We want to do something daring and reckless, you know; something that will make the good little boys open their eyes."

"There's only one objection to it," continued

Enoch. "When we send Coleman ashore we shall lose our small boat, but we can easily stop at one of the islands in the bay and borrow another."

"So we can," exclaimed Lester, with great enthusiasm. "Say, boys, what's the use of buying any provisions? Let's turn pirates and forage on the farmers for our grub?"

"That's the very idea," said Enoch.

"I am in favor of foraging and have been all the while," said Jones. "But we must be careful and not try to carry things with too high a hand. If we get the farmers down on us, they will help our pursuers all they can, and that will bring our cruise to an end very speedily. We must buy the most of our provisions and we must speak to the boys about it now, so that when they ask for a pass they can draw on the superintendent for five dollars apiece."

"But how will you get out of the lines, Enoch?" inquired Lester. "The superintendent will not grant you liberty for two days in succession."

"I'll get out; don't you worry about that," replied Enoch, confidently. "Now let's separate and post the other boys, and see who they want for treasurer. That's an official we have never had any use for before."

"Tell them that I am a candidate," said Lester, who thought he would be a little better satisfied if he could keep his five dollars in his own hands.

"That won't do at all," said Jones, quickly.

"Of course not," chimed in Enoch. "You'll have enough to do to manage the yacht. I shall push Jones for the office."

"By the way, how much did you agree to pay Coleman for giving us a ride down the river?" asked Lester.

"Twenty-five dollars," replied Enoch.

"That's a good deal of money to pay out for nothing. The understanding was that we were to capture our vessel. If we had held to that, we could have got her for nothing."

"And had a tug after us as soon as she could get up steam," replied Enoch. "As I said before, this schooner is the only yacht in port. We couldn't capture her without getting into a fight with Coleman, and if we had alarmed anybody, we should have had to run a race with the telegraph as well as with the tug. Now, remember what I say, Lester: We shall be in danger as long as we are this side of Oxford. Coleman knows that we are going to take French leave, and has promised to be as sly as he can in taking us on board the schooner; but no matter how carefully we cover up our trail, some sharp fellow like Mack will be sure to find it, and telegraph the authorities at Oxford to be on the look-out for us."

"And Coleman himself will raise an outcry just as soon as he finds out that we have given him the slip," added Jones.

"To be sure he will. I tell you, Brigham, we're going to have a time of it, and you will have a chance to show just how smart you are. After we get the schooner everything will depend upon you. If you can take us safely past Oxford and out into the bay, you will be a leader worth having, and the boys will feel so much confidence in you that they will do anything you say."

"And if I fail in my efforts to do that, they will lose what little confidence they have in me now, and put somebody else in my place," said Lester to himself, as he and his friends moved off in different directions to hunt up the rest of the band and tell them of the plans that had been determined upon. "What am I to do now?"

There was a time when Don Gordon would have been delighted with such a prospect as this. The responsibility resting upon the captain of the schooner, and which was much too heavy a burden for Lester to bear, would have aroused all the combativeness in his nature, and made him determined to succeed in spite of every obstacle that could be thrown in his way. Lester, however, felt like backing out, and he would have done so if he had received the least encouragement from a single one of the band to whom he spoke that night. They were all strongly in favor of Enoch's plan, and promised to be on hand at the appointed time with their money in their pockets.

"If you don't want to go, now is the time to say so," Lester ventured to suggest, hoping that some timid boy would take the hint and give him an excuse for staying behind himself; but the invariable reply was:

"I do want to go. I didn't agree to this thing just to hear myself talk. If you fellows are going, I am going too."

"Whom have you seen, Brigham?" asked Jones, as the two met again just before the supper call was sounded. "All right. Enoch and I have seen the rest, and have found them all true blue. There's not a single weak-kneed one among them. We mustn't leave the camp in a body, you know, for that might excite suspicion; but we'll see them in Bridgeport to-morrow afternoon, and tell them to be at Haggert's dock at dark."

They were all going, that was evident, and Lester did not see how he could refuse to accompany them. If he feigned illness or neglected to ask for a pass, he would surely be found out and accused of cowardice, and then the boys would have nothing more to do with him. There were few outside the band who ever took the trouble to speak to him, and if they deserted him he would be lonely indeed.

"And more than all, Williams and Jones would refuse to go home with me, and that would knock my visit to Maryland in the head," said Lester to himself. "That wouldn't be at all pleasant. I shall have a harder time at Rochdale than I ever had before. Don and Bert Gordon will be sure to tell all the people there how I have acted ever since I came to the academy, and what a coward I was on the night the false alarm was given, and they will make it so disagreeable for me that I can't stay. I must stick to those boys, for they are the only friends I have. I believe I'll turn the command of the yacht over to Enoch. He wants it and I don't; and if I give it up to him of my own free will, perhaps it will increase his friendship for me."

Lester breathed easier after he made this resolution, and, although he did not enjoy his sleep that night, he did not look forward with so many gloomy forebodings. He received his pass and his money when he asked for them, and in company with Jones set out for Bridgeport. They directed their course toward Haggert's dock, and when they reached it Lester obtained his first view of a sea-going yacht. One glance at her was enough to satisfy him that he could do nothing with her, and he suddenly thought of an excuse for saying so.

"Is that the schooner?" he asked, as he and his companion seated themselves on a spar that was lying on the dock.

"Why, of course she's a schooner," exclaimed Jones, looking up in surprise. "A vessel of that size wouldn't be square-rigged, would she? Can't you see that she is a fore-and-after?"

"Not being blind I can," replied Lester, loftily. "I inquired if she was *the* schooner—the one we are going to take."

"Oh!" replied Jones. "Yes, I suppose she is, but I can very soon find out," he added, as he drew his handkerchief from his pocket. "If that man who is lounging in the cockpit is Coleman, I can bring him ashore."

"Having always been used to plenty of sea-room, I am not sure that I can handle the schooner in this narrow river," said Lester.

"We are not going to stay in the river, you know," answered Jones. "We shall get out of it as soon as we can."

"I know that; but Enoch said last night that we shall be in danger as long as we remain this side of Oxford, and the boy who takes us down the river ought to be one who knows how to handle boats in close places. I don't know much about schooners, for, as I told you long ago, my yacht was a cutter."

"What's the difference?" asked Jones.

"There is a good deal of difference the first thing you know," exclaimed Lester; and fearing that he might be asked to tell what it was, he hastened to say: "Williams is a good fellow and a good sailor too, if I am any judge, and I think I will ask him to take command. Of course I could manage the schooner, and perhaps I will take her in hand after Enoch gets her out of the river."

"All right," said Jones. "I guess Enoch will take her if you ask him. That's Coleman."

"How do you know?"

"Because he waved his hand in reply to my signal, and is now coming off in his boat."

In a few minutes Coleman rowed up to the wharf in his dory. He did not get out, but stood up in his boat and kept it in its place by holding fast to a ring-bolt.

"I wanted to make sure that everything is just as it should be," said Jones, who saw that the boat-keeper was waiting to hear what he had to say. "Can we go on our cruise to-night?"

"Are you one of the deserters?" asked Coleman.

"I am; and my friend here, is another. One of our fellows was down here yesterday and talked the matter over with you. Has anything occurred to interfere with the arrangements you and he made?"

"Not that I know of. How many of you are there?"

"Just twenty-five," replied Jones.

"That will be a dollar a piece," said Coleman. "Can you raise so much money? Then it's all right; but there's one thing I want understood before we start: I must be back here before daylight."

"There's nothing to prevent it," answered Jones; "that is, if you can walk back from Windsor by that time," he added, mentally.

"I am doing this thing without my owner's knowledge," continued Coleman. "If he should come down here early in the morning and find the yacht gone, I'd lose my situation."

"We know that. All we ask of you is to take us as far as Windsor, where we intend to go ashore for an hour or two. You don't object to that, I suppose."

"Oh, no. If you don't want to go any farther than that, I can easily get back in time to avoid suspicion. Anything going on at Windsor?"

"A party," replied Jones.

After a little more conversation the two boys got up and walked away, and Coleman went back to the schooner.

"There is that much done," said Jones. "We have paved the way for getting him ashore. After we get him up in town we will lose him, and then we'll have the schooner to ourselves. Now let's separate and look out for the rest of the fellows. Tell them about the party that isn't going to come off in Windsor, and give them to understand that they may talk about it as much as they please in Coleman's hearing. Urge upon them the necessity of being on the dock at dusk, so as not to run the risk of being left behind, but caution them against forming a crowd there. We don't want anybody to see us off, and consequently we must be careful not to attract attention. Williams and I will meet you at noon at Cony Ryan's."

"Well, don't bring any other fellows with you," said Lester, who knew that this meant pies, pancakes and milk for three, and that he would have to foot the bill.

Jones said he wouldn't, and the two boys gave each other a farewell salute, and set out in different directions in search of the other members of the band.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DESERTERS AFLOAT.

IF the deserters had had the ordering of things themselves they could not have made them work more to their satisfaction. There was not a single hitch anywhere; but there was just enough excitement to put them on their mettle, and give them an idea of what was before them. In less than twenty minutes after Lester Brigham parted from his friend Jones, he ran against Captain Mack and Don Gordon. The latter wore a bayonet by his side to show that he was on duty. If they had not been so close to him, Lester would have taken to his heels. Although he had not yet deserted, and carried a paper in his pocket that would protect him, the sight of these two boys made him feel guilty and anxious.

"Hallo, Brigham," exclaimed the young captain, as he returned Lester's salute. "If I didn't know better, I should say that you were out on French leave."

"Oh, I am not," answered Lester, with more earnestness than the circumstances seemed to warrant. "I have a pass."

"I know it, for I was in the superintendent's marquee when it was given to you," said the captain. "But I must say that you look rather queer for an innocent boy. Seen anything of Enoch Williams?"

"No, I haven't," replied Lester, who now began to prick up his ears. "Is he out?"

The captain laughed and said he was.

"Has he got a pass?"

"Of course not. If he had we wouldn't be looking for him, would we? He followed Egan's example and Gordon's, and ran the guard in broad daylight. We've traced him to the village, and we're going to catch him if we have to stay here for a week. The boy who was on post at the time Enoch went out said he ran like the wind, and if I can get Don after him, I expect to see a race worth looking at. My men are scattered all over the village, and if you see Enoch I wish you would post some of them."

"I will," answered Lester.

"He won't," said Don, as he and the captain moved on.

"I know that very well," returned Mack. "Brigham is up to something himself, or else his face belies him."

"He and Jones and Williams are cronies, you know," continued Don, "and I believe that the surest way to find our man is to keep an eye on Lester."

"I believe so myself," said the captain, giving his companion a hearty slap on the back. "That's a bright idea, Gordon, and we'll act on it."

"Mack thinks he's smart, but he may find out that there are some boys in the world who are quite as smart as he is," soliloquized Lester, as he moved on up the street. "I don't know whether I want Enoch to command that schooner after all. His running the guard in daylight shows that he is inclined to take too many risks."

Lester began to be alarmed now; the village seemed to be full of Captain Mack's men. He met them at nearly every corner, and they, as in duty bound, asked to see his pass, and made inquiries concerning the deserter. Every one of them declared that there was something afoot.

"Williams didn't run the guard in that daring way and come to town for nothing," said they. "There's no circus here, nor is there anything interesting going on that we can hear of; but there's a scheme of some kind in the wind, and we know it."

Lester's fears increased every time Captain Mack's men talked to him in this way, and he began looking about for Jones. He wanted to know what the latter thought about it; but he could not find him, nor could he see any of the band. They had all disappeared very suddenly and mysteriously, and now the only academy boys he met were those who wore bayonets. Eleven o'clock came at last, and Lester was on the point of starting for Cony Ryan's, when he heard his name pronounced in low and guarded tones, and looked quickly around to see Jones standing in a dark doorway.

"Don't come in here," whispered the latter, as Lester stepped toward the door. "Stand in front of that window and pretend to be looking at the pictures, and then I'll talk to you."

Lester wonderingly obeyed, and Jones continued:

"We're suspected already."

"I know it," answered Lester, in the same cautious whisper. "Mack's men all believe that Enoch had some object in deserting as he did, and one of them said they wouldn't go home until they caught him if they had to stay here a week."

"That's just what they said to me," returned Jones. "The thing is getting interesting already, isn't it?"

"Almost too much so. What do you suppose the teachers would do to us if Mack should hear of our plans?"

"They wouldn't do anything but stop our liberty," replied Jones. "Some of the best fellows in the school make it a point to desert every camp, and there's nothing done to them. Stealing the schooner is what is going to do the business for us. We'll be sent down for that, and it's just what we want."

"Have you seen anything of Enoch?"

"Yes; he's all right. He's gone down to Ryan's to order dinner for us."

"Where are the rest of the fellows?"

"Some of them are hiding about the village, and the others have gone down to Ryan's. Enoch and I thought it best to tell them, one and all, to keep out of sight. If Mack and his men should hear of our plan, the fat would all be in the fire."

"Would they arrest us?"

"You're right."

"Why, we haven't done anything."

"No, but we're going to do something, and if they knew it, it would be their duty to stop us."

"Well, why don't you come out, or why can't I go in there?" demanded Lester. "There's no one, except village people, in sight."

"There's where you are mistaken," replied Jones. "Look across the street. Do you see that fellow on the opposite sidewalk who appears to be so deeply interested in something he sees in the window of that dry-goods store?"

Yes, Lester saw him. He had seen him before, and took him for just what he appeared to be—a country boy out for a holiday. His tight black trowsers would not come more than half-way down the legs of his big cowhide boots; his felt hat was perched on the top of a thick shock of hair which looked like a small brush-heap; his short coat sleeves revealed wrists and arms that were as brown as sole-leather; and the coarse red handkerchief which was tied around his face seemed to indicate that he was suffering from the toothache. But if he was, it did not prevent him from thoroughly enjoying his lunch—a cake of gingerbread and an apple which he had purchased at a neighboring stand, and which he devoured with so much eagerness, as he stood there in front of the window, that everybody who saw him laughed at him.

"I see some gawky over there," said Lester, after he had taken a glance at the boy.

"That's no gawky," replied Jones. "It's Don Gordon."

Lester was profoundly astonished. He faced about and looked again. There was nothing about that awkward clown, who did not know what to do with his big feet, that looked like the neat and graceful Don Gordon he had met a short time before.

"You're certainly mistaken," said Lester. "Don's pride wouldn't let him appear in the public street in any such rig as that."

"It wouldn't, eh? You don't know that boy."

"Besides, Gordon couldn't look and act so clumsy if he tried," continued Lester, who had striven in vain to imitate Don's soldierly carriage. "Why, he is making a laughing-stock of himself."

"I know it, and so does he; and he enjoys it. I don't know where he procured his disguise, but if he didn't borrow it, he bought it. He's got more money than he can spend, and he will stick at nothing that will help him gain his point. Now, can you see Mack anywhere?"

Lester looked up and down the street and replied that he could not.

"Well, he's somewhere around, and you may be sure of it," Jones went on. "He is keeping Don in sight, and Don has disguised himself so that he can keep *you* in sight. They have been following you around the streets for two hours, and this is the first chance I have had to tell you of it. Have you let anything slip?"

"No," replied Lester, indignantly.

"You're spotted, any way; and I can't, for the life of me, see why you should be if you have kept a still tongue in your head," said Jones, in deep perplexity. "Now, our first hard work must be to shake those fellows, and then we'll draw a bee-line for Cony's. When I say the word, come into the hall and go up those stairs as if all the wolves in Mississippi were close at your heels; but don't make any noise."

Lester braced himself for a jump and a run, and Jones took up a position in the hall from which he could observe Don's movements without being seen himself. The amateur detective—it really was Don Gordon—having disposed of his lunch and growing tired of waiting for Lester to make a move in some direction, shuffled rather than walked over to the other window, not neglecting, as he made this change, to take a good look at the boy he had "spotted." As soon as he was fairly settled before the other window, Jones whispered "*Now!*" whereupon Lester darted through the door and went up the stairs three at a jump. Jones lingered a minute or two and then followed him.

"It's just as I expected," said he, hurriedly, when he joined Lester at the top of the stairs. "Captain Mack was concealed somewhere down the street. He saw you when you ran through the door and signaled to Don, who is now coming across the street. Follow me and run on your toes. Stick to me, and ask no questions."

So saying Jones broke into a run and led the way through a long hall to another flight of stairs, which he descended with headlong speed, Lester keeping close at his heels. On reaching the sidewalk they slackened their pace to a walk, and Jones suddenly turned into a shoe-store, with the proprietor of which he was well acquainted.

"Mr. Smith," said he, addressing the man who stood behind the counter, "may I go in your back room long enough to take something out of my boot?"

Time was too precious to wait for the reply, which they knew would be a favorable one, so Jones and Lester kept on to the back-room. When they got there the former took his foot out of his boot—there was nothing else in it—while his companion, acting in obedience to some whispered instructions, concealed himself and kept an eye on those who passed the store.

"There he goes!" he exclaimed suddenly, as Don Gordon walked rapidly by, peering sharply through the glass doors as he went. "He must have followed us through the hall."

"Of course he did, and consequently there is no need that I should tell you why I came in here. Now we'll start for Cony's."

As Jones said this he opened a back door which gave entrance into a narrow alley, and conducted his companion through a long archway that finally brought them to a cross-street. After making sure that there were none of Captain Mack's men in sight, they came out of their concealment and walked rapidly away toward the big pond. When they reached Cony Ryan's house and entered the little parlor which had been the scene of so many midnight revels, they found it in possession of their friends, who greeted them in the most boisterous manner and inquired anxiously for Enoch Williams. A few of them had had opportunity to exchange a word or two with him, all knew how he had run the guard, but none of them could tell where he was now.

"He is safe enough," said Jones, knowingly. "Of course you don't expect him to show himself openly, as we can who have passes in our pockets. If you will be on Haggart's dock at dark—and those who are not there will stand a good chance of being left, for when we get ready to start we shall wait for nobody—you will find him. In the meantime be careful how you act, and keep out of sight as much as you can. Mack knows that we haven't come down here for nothing."

The boys said they were well aware of that fact, and Jones went on to tell how closely Don Gordon and Captain Mack had watched Lester in the hope of finding out what it was that had brought him and his friends to town that day, and described how he and Lester had managed to elude them. While the boys were laughing over the success of their stratagem, Jones disappeared through a back door, but presently returned and beckoned to Lester, who followed him into the kitchen. Cony Ryan was there, and he had just placed upon the table two large buckets covered with snow-white napkins.

"That's your dinner," said he, as he shook hands with Lester, who had put many a dollar into his pocket that term. "They tell me that you are getting to be a very bad boy, Brigham. You have put the fellows up to stealing a yacht."

"It's a pretty good scheme, isn't it?" said Jones.

"I never heard of such a thing," said Cony. "I know every boy who has been graduated at this academy during the last half century, and although there were some daring ones among them, there were none who had the hardihood to do a thing like this. I have about half made up my mind that if Captain Mack comes here, I will report the last one of you."

"Well, so long as you don't wholly make up your mind to it, we don't care," replied Jones, who knew their host too well to be alarmed by any such threats as this. "I'll take one basket, Brigham, and you can take the other. Cony, you keep your eyes open and give us the signal at the very first sign of danger."

"Where are you going?" inquired Lester, as Jones, with one of the baskets on his arm, led the way out of the door toward a grove that stood a little distance off on the shore of the big pond.

"To find Enoch," answered Jones. "I know right where he is. I say, Lester, you did something to be proud of when you got up this scheme. When Cony Ryan praises a fellow, the praise is well deserved."

"I am very well satisfied with it," said Lester, complacently. "You said something about a signal of danger; what is it?"

"Did you ever hear Cony's greyhound sing?" asked Jones in reply. "Well, if Cony sees any of Mack's men approaching his house, he'll tell his hound to 'sing,' and the animal will set up the most dismal howling you ever heard. If Enoch hears that, you will see him dig out for dear life."

After walking a short distance into the grove, the two boys came to a little creek, whose banks were thickly lined with bushes. Here Jones stopped and put down his basket, and hardly had he done so when Enoch Williams made his appearance. He had been concealed in the bushes, awaiting their arrival. This was the first time Lester had seen the deserter that day, and one would have thought by the way he complimented Enoch, that the latter, when he ran by the guard, had performed an exploit that no other boy in the academy dare attempt.

"I am glad to see you two," said Enoch, nodding his head toward the baskets, "for I am hungry."

"Any news?" asked Jones, as he spread the lunch on one of the napkins.

"Not a word," replied the deserter. "I haven't seen Mack or any of his squad for a long time."

"We have," said Lester. "We've just had some fun in getting away from them."

Of course Enoch wanted to know all about it, and Jones told the story while they were eating their lunch. The good things that Cony had put up for them rapidly disappeared before their attacks, but busy as they were, they did not neglect to keep their eyes and ears open. They depended upon Cony and his hound to guard one side of the grove, and upon themselves to detect the presence of any danger that might threaten them from other directions; but Mack and his men never came near them. Being well acquainted with Cony Ryan, they knew it would be a waste of time to look for a deserter about his premises. The old fellow was a staunch and trustworthy friend. He could not be bribed, coaxed or flattered into betraying a boy's confidence.

It seemed as if the day never would draw to a close. As Enoch did not think it safe to venture near the house, Jones and Lester kept him company in the grove, where they rolled about on the grass, consulting their watches every few minutes and laying out a programme for their cruise. By this time it was understood that Enoch was to command the schooner. He was delighted when Lester proposed it, accepted the responsibility without the least hesitation, and spoke confidently of his ability to make the cruise a lively one and to give their pursuers a long chase, if he could only succeed in getting the yacht out into the bay.

The hours wore away, and when six o'clock came the deserter and his friends finished what was left of their lunch and began to bestir themselves. Jones and Lester returned to Cony Ryan's house, which they found deserted by all save the proprietor and his family, the members of the band having formed themselves into little squads and strolled off toward the dock. Having made sure that the coast was clear, Jones went out on the back porch and gave a shrill whistle, to which the deserter responded in person.

"Now, Lester," said Jones, when Enoch entered the house, "you stay here and act as look-out for Williams, and I will take a scout about the village and see how things look there. It will be dark by the time I come back, and then we will make a start."

Jones was gone a long while, but the report he brought was a favorable one. The members of the band were all hidden about the dock, awaiting Enoch's appearance with much anxiety and impatience, and Coleman was ready to carry out his part of the contract. The sails were cast loose, and all they had to do was to slip the anchor, and let the current carry them down the river. He had seen nothing of Captain Mack or his men, nor had he been able to find any one who could tell him what had become of them. He believed they had gone back to camp.

"Mack rather plumes himself on his success in capturing deserters, I believe," said Enoch, as he arose from the sofa on which he had been lounging and put on his cap. "He fails sometimes, doesn't he?"

"Don't shout until you are out of the woods," replied Jones, who knew that his friend was congratulating himself on his cunning. "The pursuit has not fairly begun. He may gobble you yet and all the rest of us into the bargain."

"Well, it will not cost him anything to try," said Enoch, confidently. "I am more at home on the water than I am on land, and the boy who beats me handling a yacht must get up in the morning."

"But they will follow us in tugs," said Lester.

"Then we'll hide among some of the islands in the bay and let them hunt for us," replied Enoch. "I tell you it will be a cold day when we get left."

After Lester had paid for the lunch they had eaten in the grove, he and his companions left Cony Ryan's hospitable roof and set out for the dock, neglecting no precautions on the way. Jones and Lester went ahead, stopping at every corner and looking into every doorway, and Enoch, who followed a short distance behind them, did not advance until they notified him, by a peculiar whistle, that he had nothing to fear.

By keeping altogether on the back streets and giving the business thoroughfares a wide berth, they managed to reach the dock without meeting anybody. There was no one in sight when they got there, but Jones's low whistle was answered from a dozen different hiding places.

"Ahem!" said Enoch, looking toward the schooner.

"Ahem!" came the answer through the darkness. "Who is it?"

"The band," replied Enoch; and then there came a few minutes of silence and impatient waiting, during which Coleman got into his dory and shoved off toward the dock. Another whistle from Jones brought several students from their places of concealment, and when the dory was filled to its utmost capacity, it was pulled back to the schooner. Coleman was obliged to make three trips in order to take them all off, and when Jones, who was the last to leave the dock, sprang over the schooner's rail, he announced that not a single one of the band was missing.

"Keep silence fore and aft," commanded Coleman, as he made the dory's painter fast to the stern and went forward to slip the chain. "Wait until we get under way before you do any talking."

The boys were careful to obey. With a single exception they were highly elated over the success of their plans, and now that the schooner was moving off with them, they were determined that she should not come back to her berth again until she had taken them on a good long cruise. That exception was, of course, Lester Brigham. He became timid when he found himself at the mercy of the current which was carrying him off through darkness so intense that he could scarcely see the vessel's length ahead of him, and took himself to task for his foolishness in proposing such an expedition. But when he found that the schooner was seaworthy, and that Enoch knew how to keep her on top of the water and to get a good deal of speed out of her besides, these feelings gradually wore away, and he even told himself that he was seeing lots of fun.

When the current had taken the little vessel so far down the river that there was no longer any danger to be apprehended, Coleman came up to Enoch, whom he recognized as one of the leaders of the band, and inquired:

"Are there any among you who know a halliard from a down-haul?"

Enoch replied that there were.

"Then send a couple of them forward to run up the jib, while I take the wheel, said Coleman. "I want to throw her head around. No singing, now."

"What did he mean by that?" asked Lester, speaking before he thought.

"Why, have you never heard sailors sing when they were hoisting the sails?" exclaimed Enoch. "It makes the work easier, you know, and helps them pull together."

"Why, of course it does," said Lester. "What was I thinking of?"

"I don't know, I am sure. Come with me and lend a hand at the jib. Jones, you had better attend to Coleman now."

"Shall I give him his money?" asked Jones, who, we forgot to say, had been elected treasurer of the band without one dissenting voice.

"Yes; hand it over, and perhaps he will want to go ashore and spend some of it. You see," added Enoch, as he and Lester went forward, "our first hard work must be to get rid of Coleman without raising any fuss, and Jones is going to try to induce him to go off with us at Windsor; so keep away from him and let him talk."

It was so very dark and there were so many ropes leading down the foremast that Lester didn't see how Enoch could find the one he wanted; but he laid his hand upon it without the least hesitation, and when he began pulling at it, Lester knew enough to take hold and help him. The schooner swung around as the wind filled the sail, and when her bow pointed down the river the fore and main sails were hoisted, and in a few minutes more she was bowling along right merrily. Enoch superintended the work, all the boys lending willing but awkward assistance, and Coleman complimented him by saying that he was quite a sailor.

"And I am the only one on board," said he, as soon as he found opportunity to speak to Jones in private. "Brigham is a fraud of the first water. There are lots of fellows aboard who make no pretensions, but who know more about a boat in five minutes than he does in a month."

"His yacht was a cutter, you know," suggested Jones.

"Oh, get out!" exclaimed Enoch. "He doesn't know a cutter from a full-rigged ship."

Lester, who was painfully aware that his ignorance of all things pertaining to a yacht had been fully exposed, was leaning against the weather-rail, heartily wishing himself back at the academy. He then and there resolved that he would never again attempt to win a reputation among his fellows by boasting. It is a bad thing to do; and the boy who indulges in it is sure to bring himself into contempt sooner or later.

CHAPTER XIV.

DON OBTAINS A CLUE.

"HOW have you succeeded with Coleman?" continued Enoch. "Are we going to get rid of him as easily as we hoped?"

"Coleman is all right," was Jones's encouraging reply. "I laid a neat little trap for him, and he fell into it just as easy! I told him that we had been followed nearly all day, and he said he knew it, for he had seen Mack and some of his squad on the dock. I told him, too, that Mack knew all about the party at Windsor, and that I was afraid he would go down there and lie in wait for us; and Coleman offered to go ashore in the dory and reconnoiter."

"Good!" exclaimed Enoch. "Just the minute he is out of sight we'll fill away for the bay. Now let's post the other boys, so that they may know just what is expected of them."

The deserters did not at all enjoy their ride down the river, for they were thinking about something else. They were impatient to see the last of Coleman, and trembling for fear that something would happen to excite his suspicions. They were strong enough to take the schooner from him by force, and there were some reckless ones in the band who openly advocated it; but the majority would not listen to them. They had enough to answer for already, they said, and they would not countenance any such high-handed proceeding. While they were talking about it they sighted Windsor.

"I guess I had better run in and tie up to the wharf," said Coleman, who stood at the wheel.

"Don't do that," said Enoch, quickly. He wanted to keep the schooner out in the river so that when the proper time came he could fill away without the loss of a moment. If she were made fast to the wharf and the sails were lowered, it would be a work of some difficulty to get under way again, and if Coleman were the active and quick-witted man they took him for, he would upset all their plans in an instant.

"That wouldn't do at all," chimed in Jones. "How do we know but that Mack and his men are hidden there on the wharf all ready to board us as soon as we come alongside?"

"Couldn't you fight 'em off?" inquired Coleman.

"We might, but we'll not try it," said Enoch. "There's no law that prevents a deserter from hiding or taking to his heels, but if he should resist arrest, they'd snatch him bald-headed. We don't want to fight, for we're deep enough in the mud already."

"What will the superintendent do to you when you go back?" asked Coleman.

"Oh, he'll court-martial us and stop our liberty," replied Jones. "But we don't care for that, you know. We intend to have so much fun to-night at the party that we can afford to stay in camp during the rest of the month."

Jones did not think it best to tell Coleman that he and his companions stood a fine chance of being expelled from the academy to pay for this night's work. He was afraid that if he did, the man would refuse to assist them in their scheme, and that he would come about and take them back to Bridgeport. If he had tried that, there would have been trouble beyond a doubt, for his passengers were bound to make themselves famous before they went back. They succeeded beyond their most sanguine expectations. It is true that they were taken to the academy under arrest, but they were looked upon as heroes and not as culprits who were deserving of punishment. They gave the students and everybody else something to talk about, but not in the way they had anticipated.

"The safest plan you can pursue is to leave the schooner out here in the river, and go ashore in the dory and see that the way is clear," continued Jones.

"I don't know of but one house in Windsor that is big enough for a party, and that's Dr. Norton's," said Coleman.

"There's right where we're going," said Enoch, at a venture. "We want you to go out there and look carefully about his grounds to make sure that Mack and his men are not in hiding there."

"Why, it's a mile from the village!" exclaimed Coleman.

"What of that?"

"It would take me an hour to go there and come back," replied the man, "and to tell the truth, I am afraid to trust the yacht in your hands for that length of time. You might beach her, or a steamer might run her down in the dark."

"You needn't be afraid of that," replied Jones. "Williams can take care of her. He owned and sailed a yacht years ago."

"And here's another thing," said Enoch. "You ought to remember that you are as deeply interested in this matter as we are. If Mack and his men should capture us now, wouldn't they find out that you are using your owner's yacht without his knowledge, and wouldn't they get you into trouble by speaking of it?"

"So they would," answered Coleman. "I didn't think of that. I must help you now whether I want to or not. Well, I'll go ashore, as I agreed. Who's going to manage the schooner while I am gone?"

Enoch answered that he was.

"All right. Take the wheel, and let me see you throw the yacht up into the wind."

Enoch complied, and Coleman had no fault to find with the way in which he executed the maneuver. As soon as the schooner lost her headway, the man clambered down into the dory and pushed off toward the dock, not forgetting to tell Enoch that he left the yacht entirely in his hands, and that he (Enoch) would be responsible for her safety.

"Don't be uneasy," was the boy's reassuring reply. "I know just what I want to do; and I'm going to do it," he added, in a lower tone. "Go for'ard, Jones, and keep an eye on him as long as you can. When you see him go up the street that leads from the wharf, let me know."

The impatient boys watched Coleman as he rowed toward the dock, and presently they saw his head bobbing up and down in front of the lights in the store windows. As soon as he disappeared up the road that led to Dr. Norton's house, Jones carried the news to Enoch, who filled away and stood down the river again. The deserters were so delighted at the success of their stratagem that they danced hornpipes, and could with difficulty restrain themselves from shouting aloud.

"Brigham, tell those fellows to keep still," commanded the new captain. "Now, Jones, the next thing is something else. We've got the schooner easy enough, but what shall we do with her?"

"Let's crack on and get into the bay as soon as we can," suggested Jones.

"I should like to, for I know we are not safe as long as we are in the river, but I am afraid to put any more canvas on her. Not being familiar with the channel I am going it blind, and I don't want to knock a hole in her, or run her high and dry on a sand-bar before I know it. I think it would be safest to stay here for a while, and let our pursuers get ahead of us, so that we will be in their wake instead of having them in ours. Perhaps you had better talk it up among the boys and see what they think of it. While you are about it, find out if there is any one in the band who knows the river. If there is, send him to me."

Jones hurried away to obey this order, and presently returned with a boy who lived in Oxford, and who had often piloted his father's tugs up and down the river. The information he gave the captain was contained in a very few words, but it proved to be of great value to him. The boy told him that he had better keep as close to the bluff banks as he could, for there was where the channel was; but when he came to a place where the banks were low on both sides, he would find the deepest water pretty near the middle of the river.

"That's all I want to know about that," said Enoch. "It is eleven o'clock, isn't it, and we are about thirty-five miles from Bridgeport? Very well. How much farther down the river ought the current and this wind to take us by daylight?"

"I should think it ought to take us past Mayville, and that is seventy miles from Bridgeport," replied the boy.

"Do you know of any little creeks around there that we could hide in during the day?"

The boy said there were a dozen of them.

"All right," answered Enoch. "Perhaps you had better stay on deck with me to-night, and to-morrow we will sleep. Now Jones, divide the crew into two equal watches, and send one of them below if they are sleepy and want to go. Then bring up a couple of lanterns and hang them to the catheads. If we don't show lights we may get run over."

Jones proved to be an invaluable assistant, and it is hard to tell how Enoch would have got on without him. He hung out the lamps, set the watch, and then he and some of the band went below to take a look at their floating home. He peeped into all the state-rooms, glanced at the forecastle, examined all the lockers as well as the galley and pantry, and was delighted with everything he saw.

"I didn't know there was so much elbow-room on one of these little boats," said he, after he had finished his investigations. "There are provisions enough in the store-rooms to last us a week, and the owner has left his trunk and his hunting and fishing traps on board."

"That must not be touched," said Enoch, decidedly.

"It wouldn't do any harm to take out one of those fine breech-loaders and knock over a mess of squirrels with it," said Jones.

"Yes, it would. Most men are very particular about their guns and don't want strangers to use them. We must return all this property in just as good order as it was when it came into our hands. We've got money enough to buy our own grub, and I'll raise a row with the first fellow who dips into those provisions, I don't care who he is. We're not mean, if we did run away with the schooner."

Perhaps Egan would have been astonished to have heard such sentiments as these expressed by the boy whom he believed to be the "meanest fellow that ever lived." Enoch could be manly so long as he was good-natured, and so could Lester Brigham. It was when they got angry that they showed themselves in their true characters. It may be that the fear of a rigorous prosecution by the angry owner of the yacht had something to do with the stand Enoch took in regard to the provisions and hunting outfit.

Of course none of the band wanted to go below, inviting as the berths looked, and Enoch, who liked company, did not insist upon it. They showed a desire to sing, but that was something the captain opposed. The noise they made would be sure to attract the attention of some of the people living along the banks, and put it in their power to aid Captain Mack and his men when they came in pursuit. He wanted to cover up their trail so as to mystify everybody.

"You need not expect to do that," said one of the band. "Coleman will blow the whole thing as soon as he gets home."

"But I don't think he will go home and face his owner after what he has done," said Enoch. "I know I shouldn't want to do it if I were in his place. If he keeps away from Bridgeport, so much the better for us. Wait till we get out of danger, and then you can sing to your hearts' content."

Enoch stood at the wheel all night, and the boy who lived in Oxford kept him company to see that he gave the sand-bars a wide berth. Some of the band managed to sleep a little, but the majority of the members lounged about the deck and wondered what they were going to do for excitement during their cruise.

The schooner passed Mayville shortly after daylight, and the deserters could not see that there was any one stirring. About half an hour afterward Enoch's companion directed his attention to a wide creek which he said would afford an excellent hiding-place for their vessel during the day, and the schooner was accordingly turned into it. After she had run as far up the stream as the wind would carry her, the sails were hauled down, a dory they found in the creek was manned, a line got out, and the yacht was towed around the bend out of sight, and made fast to the bank.

And where were Captain Mack and his men all this time, and did they succeed in finding the trail of the deserters in spite of all Enoch's efforts to cover it up? They spent the night in their quarters, and struck a hot scent the first thing in the morning. It came about in this way:

When Lester Brigham, with Jones's assistance, succeeded in eluding Don Gordon, the latter became firmly settled in the belief that there was "something up." He and Captain Mack used their best endeavors to get on Lester's track again, looking in every place except the one in which they would have been sure to find him. That was at Cony Ryan's house. As we said before, they did not go there because they knew it would be time wasted.

"It's no use, Gordon," said Captain Mack, after he and his squad had searched all the streets and looked into every store in the village. "They're safe at Cony's, and we might as well go home. I hope they will stay out all night so that we can have another chance to-morrow. I don't like to give up beaten."

Captain Mack knew where to find every one of his men, and in half an hour's time they were all marching back to camp. The young officer reported his return and his failure to capture the boy who had run the guard, adding that he had a strong suspicion that Enoch, Lester and the rest had some plan in their heads, and that they did not intend to return to camp of their own free will.

"Very well," said the superintendent. "If they do not return to-night, you had better take a squad and go down to the village in the morning and make inquiries. If they can get away from you they are pretty smart."

"Thank you, sir. I will do my best, but I can't hope for success if I am to be hampered by orders."

"No, I suppose not," said the superintendent, with a laugh. "You would rather waste your time in running about the country than stay here in camp and attend to your business."

"I am ahead of my class, sir," said Mack.

"I know it. Well, stay out until you learn all about their plans, if they have any, and capture them if you know where they have gone. I presume that is the order you want."

"Yes, sir; that's the very one," said Mack, with so much glee in his tones that the superintendent and all the teachers laughed heartily. "May I select my own men and take as many as I want."

"Certainly, provided you leave enough to do camp duty."

"I will, sir. I'll take a man for every deserter."

Captain Mack made his salute and hurried out, laughing all over. His first care was to go to the officer of the guard and find out just how many boys there were in Lester's party (he took it for granted that they were all together and that they intended to desert and go off somewhere to have a good time), and his next to make out a list of the boys who were to comprise his squad. It is hardly necessary to say that the names of Don and Bert Gordon, Egan, Curtis and Hopkins appeared on that list. The captain meant to have a good time himself, and he wanted some good fellows to help him enjoy it.

"I have a roving commission, fellows," he said to the boys, as fast as he found them. "If I can find out where those deserters have gone, I shall not come back without them. Stick a pin there."

"Good for you, Mack," was the universal verdict.

"I tell you it pays for a fellow to mind his business," continued the delighted captain. "I never would have been allowed so great a privilege if I hadn't behaved myself pretty well this term. Say nothing to nobody, but hold yourselves in readiness to leave camp at daylight. We'll get breakfast in the village. If you haven't plenty of money, perhaps you had better ask for some; and while you are about it, you might as well get ten dollars apiece. The superintendent is not very particular about financial matters during camp, you know."

That was true, but still he looked surprised when more than twenty boys came to him that night and asked for ten dollars each. He handed over the money, however, without asking any questions, and when the last one went out he said to the teachers who had gathered in his marquee:

"This looks as if Captain Mack were up to something himself. Well, he's a good boy, he associates with none but good boys, and we can trust him with the full assurance that any privileges we grant him will not be abused."

Captain Mack and his chosen men did not get much sleep that night. Although they firmly believed that a large party of students had deserted the camp they had no positive proof of the fact, and they were in a state of great uncertainty and suspense. They hoped from the bottom of their hearts that Lester and the rest would not come in, for if they did, that was the end of the fun. Some of them ran out of their tents every time a sentry challenged, and always breathed easier when they found that none of the suspected parties had returned. At ten o'clock the challenges ceased, and after that no one came through the lines. Captain Mack went to the guard tent and found that none of Lester's crowd had returned, and then he knew that his scout was an assured thing. The band was gone sure enough, and the next thing was to find it. All the members of his squad reported for duty promptly at daylight (not one of them waited to be called), and in five minutes more they were on their way to the village.

"Now, boys," said the captain, as he halted the squad in front of the post-office, "scatter out, and take a look about the streets for half an hour, and then report for breakfast at the International, which will be our headquarters as long as we stay here. I will go down there and tell them that we want something to eat as soon as they can dish it up."

The boys "scattered out" in obedience to their order, and a short time afterward Don Gordon drew up at Haggart's dock, where he found a portly old gentleman who seemed to be greatly excited about something, for he was striding back and forth, talking to himself and flourishing his cane in the air. This was Mr. Packard—the one to whom Don and Bert presented their letter of introduction on the night they got into trouble with the guard, and saved Sam Arkwright from being ducked in the big pond by Tom Fisher and his followers.

"I declare I don't understand this thing at all," said Mr. Packard, shaking his cane at Don, as the latter came up and wished him a hearty good morning.

"Neither do I," replied Don, who knew that the angry old gentleman expected him to say something.

"Now there's that villain, Coleman," continued

Mr. Packard, bringing the iron ferrule of his heavy stick down upon the dock to give emphasis to his words. "I've done everything I could for that man. I've footed his doctor bill when he was ill, paid him more wages than he demanded, given him employment when I didn't really need him, and now he's gone and run off with my boat. I say hanging is too good for such an ingrate. Come up to the house and take breakfast with me, Don. We haven't seen you and Bert there in a long time. What are you doing here at this hour in the morning? Have you deserted again, you young scamp?"

"No, *sir*," said Don, emphatically. "I haven't been in a single scrape this term."

"You were in that fight at Hamilton, and I call that something of a scrape. Everybody says you behaved with the greatest coolness. I am proud of you, do you hear me?" said Mr. Packard, again shaking his cane at Don.

"Thank you, sir," was the reply. "What I meant to say was, that I have broken none of the rules, and don't mean to, either. Do you see this bayonet? I am on duty, and consequently, I am obliged, much to my regret, to decline your kind invitation. I am out after a lot of deserters."

"I hope you'll not catch them," exclaimed Mr. Packard. "Let them enjoy themselves while they are young, for old age comes all too soon—too soon. I haven't forgotten that I was a boy once myself. Come up to the house as often as you can—you and Bert. We are always glad to see you."

The old gentleman walked quickly away, and then he as quickly stopped and shook his cane at the anchor buoy which marked the berth in which his schooner lay the last time he visited the dock.

"Now there's that Coleman," said he. "I'll give him till dark to bring that boat back, and if he doesn't do it, I'll have the police after him. I will, for I can't stand any such nonsense."

"I have an idea," said Don; and he also left the dock, performing a little problem in mental arithmetic as he hurried away. Given a five-knot breeze and a three-mile current, how far could a vessel like the Sylph (that was the name of Mr. Packard's missing yacht) go in a narrow and crooked channel in nine or ten hours? That was the question he was trying to solve. While he was working at it, he entered a telegraph office and found the operator dozing in his chair. He held a few minutes' consultation with him, which must have resulted in something that was entirely satisfactory to Don, for when the latter came out of the office and hurried toward the hotel, his face wore an excited and delighted look. He found the squad at breakfast, he being the last to report.

"What kept you?" demanded the captain, as Don entered and took his seat at the table.

"Business," was the laconic reply. "Have any of you got a clue?"

No, they hadn't. With all their trying they had not been able to gain any tidings of the deserters, who had disappeared in some mysterious way and left no trace behind. Their leader, whoever he was, had shown considerable skill in conducting their flight so as to baffle pursuit.

"You're a wise lot," said Don. "I have a clue."

A chorus of exclamations arose on all sides, and the captain laid down his knife and fork and settled back in his chair.

"I know right where they were about the time we left camp this morning," continued Don.

"Where were they?" exclaimed all the boys at once.

"A long way from here. I tell you, Mack, the superintendent didn't dream of this when he gave you your roving commission. Is it necessary that you should report to him for further orders?"

"No. He told me to catch those fellows if I could learn where they were, and that's the only order I want."

"All right. What do you say to a sail on the bay?"

The students raised a shout that made the spacious dining-room echo. "Have they gone that way?" asked the captain.

"They have, and this is the way I found it out," answered Don, who, having worked his auditors up to the highest pitch of excitement, went on to repeat the conversation he had held with Mr. Packard, and wound up by saying: "Somehow I couldn't help connecting the deserters with the disappearance of that yacht; so I dropped into a telegraph office, and the operator, at my request, spoke to Mayville, who, after taking about fifteen minutes to gain information, replied that the Sylph had gone down the river at daylight with a lot of students aboard."

"Hurrah!" shouted Captain Mack; while his men broke out into a yell, pounded the table, clapped their hands, and acted altogether so unlike orderly guests of a first-class hotel, that the proprietor came in to see what was the matter.

"Break all the dishes," said he, swinging his arms around his head. "Turn the house out of doors, if you want to; it's paid for!"

"We'll try to stop before we do any damage, Mr. Mortimer," said Captain Mack, with a laugh. "Now pitch in everybody, so that we can take the first train."

"Where are we going, Mack," inquired Curtis.

"To Oxford. Egan is a sailor-man, and—you know Mr. Shelby, of course."

These words enabled the students to see through Mack's plan at once, and they made another boisterous demonstration of delight and approval. They knew Mr. Shelby, who owned the finest and swiftest yacht in Oxford. He was an academy boy, and had once been famous as a good runner. He was a soldier as well as a sailor, as full of fun and mischief as any boy in Mack's squad, and just the man to help Lester and his band with one hand, while giving their pursuers a lift with the other. Of course he would lend them his yacht and take as deep an interest in the race as any student among them.

Breakfast over, Don asked and obtained permission to run up to Mr. Packard's and let him know what had become of the Sylph. To his great surprise the old gentleman took it as a huge joke, and laughed heartily over it. He warned Don that the schooner was a hard boat to beat when Coleman was at the helm, and declared that if the deserters would return her safe and sound, they might keep her a month and welcome. He would never make them any trouble on account of it. He was sorry to give up his cruise, but then his brother had just left Newport in his yacht, and when he arrived, he (Mr. Packard) would go off somewhere with him. It was plain that his sympathies were all with the runaways, although he knew nothing of the great service they were going to render him and others. If it hadn't been for those same deserters, Mr. Packard would never again have seen his brother alive.

CHAPTER XV.

ANOTHER TEST AND THE RESULT.

"KEEP her away, Burgess! If the ragged end of that spar hits us it may send us to the bottom. Slack away the fore-sheet! Stand by, everybody, and don't let him go by for your lives! He looks as though he couldn't hold on another minute."

It was Egan who issued these hurried orders. He was standing on the weather-rail of Mr. Shelby's yacht, the Idlewild, which was sailing as near into the wind's eye as she could be made to go, now and then buoying her nose in a tremendous billow that broke into a miniature cataract on her forecastle and deluged her deck with water. He was drenched to the skin, and so were the boys who were stationed along the rail below him, trembling all over with excitement, and watching with anxious faces one of the most thrilling scenes it had ever been their lot to witness.

There had been a terrible storm along the coast. It was over now, the clouds had disappeared and the sun was shining brightly; but the wind was still blowing half a gale, there was a heavy sea running, and the waves seemed to be trying their best to complete the work of destruction that had been commenced by the storm. Two points off the weather-bow there had been, a few minutes before, a little water-logged sloop, over which the waves made a clean breach; but she was gone now. All on a sudden her bow arose in the air, her stern settled deep in the water, and the yacht, which had set sail from Newport a few days before with a merry party of excursionists on board, went down to the bottom of the bay. Broad on the Idlewild's beam was the Sylph, the deserters working like beavers to rescue the crew of the sunken yacht, heedless or ignorant of the fact that they were in jeopardy themselves, their vessel being so badly handled by the frightened and inexperienced boy at her wheel, that she was in imminent danger of broaching to. Tossed about by the waves which rolled between the Idlewild and the Sylph was a broken spar to which a student, with a pale but determined face, clung desperately with one arm, while in the other he supported the inanimate form of a little boy. The student was Enoch Williams, and the boy was Mr. Packard's nephew.

The last time we saw the Sylph she was hiding in the creek a short distance below Mayville. That was a week ago, and her persevering and determined pursuers had but just come up with her. During the day the deserters purchased a small supply of provisions from the neighboring farmers, fished a little, slept a good deal, and when darkness came to conceal their movements they got under way again, and stood down the river, taking the stolen dory with them. At daylight they found another hiding-place, and before dawn the next morning they ran by Oxford, a bustling little city situated at the mouth of the river. If they were pursued they did not know it. They made cautious inquiries as often as they had opportunity, but no one could give them any information, because Captain Mack and his men had escaped observation by going from Bridgeport to Oxford on the cars.

When the Sylph ran out into the bay, the deserters began to feel perfectly safe. They shouted and sung themselves hoarse, and told one another that they were seeing no end of sport; but in their hearts they knew better. How was their cruise going to end? was the unwelcome question that forced itself into their minds every hour in the day, and none of them could answer it satisfactorily. It might be a daring exploit to run off with a private yacht, but they didn't think so now that the mischief was done, and there was not one among them who did not wish that he had taken some other way to get out of the academy. Enoch very soon became disgusted. The wind being brisk he was obliged to be at the wheel nearly all the time, and he couldn't see the fun of working so steadily while the rest of the band were lying around doing nothing.

"I'll tell you what's a fact," said he to Jones, one day. "There's too much of a sameness about this thing to suit me. I have the best notion in the world to desert the yacht the next time we go ashore, and strike a straight course for home."

"I have been thinking seriously of the same thing," answered Jones.

"It's a cowardly thing to do," continued Enoch, "but when I fall to thinking of the settlement that's coming, I can't sleep, it troubles me so.

Suppose the man who owns this yacht is one who can't take a joke! Do you know that we have rendered ourselves liable to something worse than expulsion from the academy?"

"I didn't think of that until it was too late," said Jones.

"Neither did I; nor did I think to ask myself what my father would say and do about it. I believe our best plan would be to go back and put the schooner in her berth. It will take us four or five days to do that, and during that time each fellow can decide for himself how he will act when we get to Bridgeport—whether he will go home, or return to the academy and face the music."

"That's a good idea," exclaimed Jones. "I know what I shall do. I shall get into camp, if I can, without being caught, and report for duty. Let's all do that, and if we return the schooner in as good order as she was when we found her, we shall escape the disgrace of being sent down, and at the same time have the satisfaction of knowing that we have done something that no other crowd ever attempted. After we get home we can tell our fathers that we don't want to come back to school, and perhaps we can induce them to listen to us. That fight with the mob will be in our favor, for after our folks have had time to think it over calmly, they'll not willingly put us in the way of getting into another. That's the best plan, and you may depend upon it."

"I think so myself," said Enoch. "Call the boys aft and ask them what they think about it."

It is hardly necessary to say that the runaways were delighted with the prospect of escaping the consequences of their folly. Their cruise among the islands of the bay had been almost entirely devoid of interest. It is true that they had raided a few melon-patches and corn-fields, and that a little momentary excitement had been occasioned by the discovery of suspicious sails behind them; but their foraging had been accomplished with small difficulty and without detection, and the sails belonged to coasters which held their course without paying any attention to the schooner. Without giving Jones, who did the talking, time to enter fully into an explanation, the deserters broke into cheers, and some of them urged the captain to turn the schooner's bow toward Oxford at once.

"I am afraid to do it," said Enoch, as soon as he could make himself heard. "Just turn your eyes in that direction for a moment."

The boys looked, and saw a milk-white cloud, followed by one as black as midnight, rapidly rising into view above the horizon. Underneath, the sea was dark and threatening.

"There's wind in those clouds, and plenty of it, too," continued the captain. "If we are caught in it we are gone deserters. Our only chance for safety is to make the lee of that island you see ahead of us."

The runaways watched the clouds with a good deal of anxiety. Up to this time the wind had been fair and the weather all they could have desired; but now it looked as though the Storm King were about to show them what he could do when he got into a rage. The clouds came up with startling rapidity; the lightning began playing around their ragged edges, the mutterings of distant thunder came to their ears, and their haven of refuge seemed far away; but fortunately the breeze held out, and just a few minutes before the wind changed with a roar and a rush, and the storm burst forth in all its fury, the Sylph dropped her spare anchor in a sheltered nook under the lee of the island, and with everything made snug, was prepared to ride it out. The rain fell in torrents, driving the boys below and keeping them there until long after midnight. The wind blew as they had never heard it blow before, but the anchor held, and shortly before daylight the thunder died away in the distance, and finally the sun arose in unclouded splendor. The runaways were all hungry, for they had had no supper, and as their provisions were all exhausted, some of them began to talk of laying violent hands upon those in the lockers.

"There's no need of doing that," said Enoch, after he had taken a look around. "All hands stand by to get ship under way. It doesn't blow to hurt anything, and we'll take the back track without any delay. After a glorious spin over these waves, we'll stop for breakfast at the island where we robbed our last corn-field. It's only a few miles away, and it will make the Sylph laugh to run down there with such a breeze as this."

The deserters had become accustomed to yield prompt and unquestioning obedience to Enoch's orders, but there were some among them who did not at all like the idea of going out of the cove to face the white caps that were running in the bay. If there had been any one to propose it and to direct their movements afterward, a few of them would have refused duty; but the majority, having confidence in Enoch's skill and caution, went to work to get the chain around the little windlass which served the Sylph in lieu of a capstan, and when they shipped the handspikes, the timid ones took hold and helped run the vessel up to her anchor. She was got under way without difficulty, and as long as she remained behind the island where the wind was light and the sea comparatively smooth, she made such good weather of it that Lester Brigham and those like him, began to take courage; and they even struck up: "Here let my home be, in the waters wide," to show how happy they were, and how much they enjoyed the rapid motion. But their song ceased very suddenly when they rounded the promontory at the foot of the island, and saw what there was before them. In front, behind and on both sides of them were tumbling, white-capped billows, whose tops were much higher than the schooner's rail, and which came rolling slowly and majestically toward them, but with dreadful force and power. It seemed as if every one of them were higher than its predecessor, and that nothing could save the Sylph, which bounded onward with increased speed.

"This is something like a sail!" shouted Enoch, who was all excitement now. "This is what puts life into a fellow. I wish some other schooner would show up, so that we could have a race with her. How she flies!"

"Look out or you'll tip us over," whined Lester, who was holding on for life.

"No fear of that," replied Enoch. "The Sylph is no 'skimming-dish.' She's deep as well as wide, and being built for safety instead of speed, I couldn't capsize her if I should try."

"There's the boat you were wishing for," said Jones, suddenly. "Now you can have a race if you want it."

Enoch looked around, and was surprised as well as startled to see a handsome little yacht scarcely more than a mile distant from them and following in their wake. She was carrying an immense spread of canvas, considering the breeze that was blowing and the sea that was running, but that her captain was not satisfied with the speed she was making was evident from the fact that while the deserters looked at her, they saw a couple of her crew mount to the cross-trees to shake out the gaff-topsails.

"That's the most suspicious-looking fellow we have seen yet," remarked Enoch, after he had taken a good look at the stranger. "He don't crack on in that style for nothing. Hallo! what's the matter with you?" he added, as Jones gave a sudden start and came very near dropping the spy-glass which he had leveled at the yacht.

"They're after us, as sure as the world," exclaimed Jones, in great excitement. "Those fellows who are going aloft are dressed in uniform."

"Then we're as good as captured," said Enoch, spitefully. "There isn't a single boy in the band who can go up and loosen the topsails, or whom I dare trust at the wheel while I do it. If I had as good a crew as he has, I'd beat him or carry something away; but what can I do with a lot of haymakers."

"There's another boat right ahead of us," said one of the deserters.

Enoch was not a little astonished as well as frightened by the sight that met his gaze when he turned his eyes from the pursuing yacht to the boat in advance of them. He expected to find that she also was full of students; but instead of that she was a complete wreck. Her mast had gone by the board and was now dragging alongside, pounding the doomed yacht with fearful violence every time a wave rose and fell beneath it. There was no small boat to be seen, and Enoch thought at first that the sloop had been abandoned; but when she was lifted on the crest of a billow and he obtained a better view of her, he was horrified to discover that there were three men and a woman lashed to the rigging. The sight was a most unexpected one, and for a minute or two Enoch could not speak. He stood as if he had grown fast to the deck, and then all the manhood there was in him came to the surface. Those helpless people must be taken off that wreck at all hazards. He looked at the pursuing yacht, and then he looked at the sloop. The former was coming up hand over hand, but she was still far away, and the sloop might go to the bottom at any moment. Probably she was kept afloat by water-tight compartments. The spar that was towing alongside would very soon smash them in, and then she would go down like a piece of lead, being heavily ballasted and having no buoyant cargo to sustain her.

"Jones," said Enoch, speaking rapidly but calmly, "you have stood by me like a good fellow so far, and you mustn't go back on me now. Come here and take the wheel. I am going to save that lady or go to the bottom while trying."

"Are you going off in the dory?" faltered Jones, as he laid his hands upon the wheel.

"Of course. There's nothing else I can do."

"Then you will go to the bottom, sure enough."

"I can't help it if I do," said Enoch, desperately. "I will throw the yacht up into the wind before I go, and all you've got to do is to hold the wheel steady and keep her there till I get back—if I ever do. I say, fellows," he added, addressing the frightened boys who were gathered around him, "I am going off in the dory after that lady, and I want one of you to go with me. Who'll volunteer?"

The deserters were so astonished that there was no immediate response. The dory was small, the waves were high, and it looked like certain death to venture out among them. After a moment's indecision one of them stepped forward and prepared himself for the ordeal by discarding his coat and hat and kicking off his boots. Who do you suppose it was? It was Lester Brigham. The boy who had hidden his head under the bedclothes when he thought that the rioters were coming to attack the academy, now showed, to the surprise of everybody, that he was not a coward after all. Enoch could not have picked out an abler assistant. He was a good oarsman, he could swim like a duck, and, better than all, his courage never faltered when he found himself in the dory battling with the waves. His companions, who dared not go on so perilous a mission themselves, cheered him loudly as he stepped forward, and Enoch shook him warmly by the hand, saying in a low tone:

"We said we would give the academy boys something to talk about, and now we're going to do it."

The schooner ran on by the wreck, whose crew, seeing that an attempt was to be made to rescue them, cheered faintly, but made no effort to free themselves from their lashings. The reason was because they were utterly exhausted, and they were afraid that if they loosed their bonds, the first wave that broke over the sloop's deck would carry them into the sea.

As soon as the Sylph had been thrown up into the wind, Enoch and Lester, whose faces were white but resolute, scrambled down into the dory, and the struggle began. The waves tossed their little craft about like an egg-shell, but they kept manfully on, and in ten minutes more, they were alongside the wreck. The lady, who was insensible from fright or exposure, was the first to be released and placed in the boat, and then the men were taken care of, one after the other. As Enoch approached the last one, he saw that the man carried in his arms a bundle that was wrapped up in a blanket. He held fast to it, too, in spite of the boy's efforts to take it from him; but as Enoch assisted him toward the dory, a wave, higher than the rest, knocked them both off their feet, and as the man was hauled into the boat Enoch missed the frantic grasp he made at a life-line, and the water rushing across the deck carried him overboard. Close in front of him was the bundle which had slipped from the grasp of the rescued man when he lost his footing. As the wave hurried it across the deck toward an opening in the bulwarks the blanket fell off, revealing to Enoch's astonished gaze the handsome features of a little four-year-old boy, who turned his blue eyes pleadingly toward him for an instant, and then disappeared over the side. Enoch made a desperate clutch at the golden curls, and when he arose to the surface, he brought his prize with him; but he had to go down again the next moment to escape destruction from the spar, which the next wave brought toward him broadside on. It had been torn from its fastenings at last, but it had done its deadly work. There was a great hole in the sloop's side, and the water was pouring into it.

"I say, Lester!" shouted Enoch, as he came up on the other side of the spar, shook the water from his face and held the boy aloft so that he could breathe. "Get away from there."

"Oh, my boy!" cried one of the men in the dory, who now discovered that he had lost the precious burden to which he had so lovingly clung through long hours of exposure and suffering.

"He's all right," shouted Enoch, encouragingly.

"I've got a good grip on him. Lester, I tell you to get away from there! Hold the dory head on to the waves, and she'll ride them without shipping a drop of water. If the Sylph doesn't make stern-way enough to pick you up, the other yacht will take care of you."

Not knowing just how much of a swirl the sloop would make when she went to the bottom, Enoch exerted all his powers as a swimmer to get himself and his burden out of reach of it. He succeeded in his object, and when the wreck had sunk out of sight and he thought it safe to do so, he swam back to the spar and laid hold of it. Then he looked around for the dory. She had been hauled alongside the Sylph by aid of the line that one of the crew had been thoughtful enough to throw to her, and the sloop's crew were being hoisted over the rail one after the other.

"Hard a starboard! Stand by, everybody," shouted a voice above him.

The pursuing yacht came gracefully up into the wind, and as the bold swimmer was lifted on the crest of a wave strong hands grasped his arms, and he and his prize were lifted out of the water and over the rail to the Idlewild's deck.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ROD AND GUN CLUB.

THE first southward bound train that passed through Bridgeport on the morning that Don Gordon so unexpectedly obtained a clue to the whereabouts of the deserters, took him and all the rest of Captain Mack's men to Oxford. Although the young officer had full authority to act in this way, he did not omit to drop a note into the post-office, telling the superintendent where he had gone and what he intended to do.

"He'll not get it before ten o'clock," said the captain, gleefully, "and by that time we shall be so far away that he will not think it worth while to recall us, or to send a teacher after us."

"We don't want any teacher with us," said Don. "We can do this work ourselves."

"Of course we can; and what's more, we're going to. Now, keep out of sight, all of us, and don't go out on the platform when we stop at the stations. We don't want to see any despatches. We're doing this ourselves, and having begun it, we want to go through with it."

The next time the superintendent heard from Captain Mack and his men they were at Oxford, and ready to continue the pursuit in the Idlewild, which was lying to in the river when Mack sent the despatch. In fact he took pains to see that everything was ready for the start before he went near the telegraph office. He got the yacht, as he knew he would, without the least trouble (Mr. Shelby laughed heartily when he heard what the deserters had done, and said he wished he had thought of such a thing when he was a boy), laid in a stock of provisions and water, and then turned the management of affairs over to Egan, who selected his crew and got the yacht under way. When she came abreast of the city (the berth she usually occupied was about a mile up the river) Mack went ashore in the dory, and after sending off his despatch, telling the superintendent where he was and what he intended to do next, he plumed himself on having done his full duty as a gentleman and an officer."

"He couldn't stop us now if he wanted to," said Mack, as he returned aboard and the Idlewild filled away for the bay, "for there are no telegraph offices outside, and if we see a tug after us, we'll hide from her. But the superintendent can't say that I didn't keep him posted, can he?"

The pursuing vessel had a much better crew than the Sylph—of the twenty-three boys aboard of her there were an even dozen who could go aloft and stand their trick at the wheel—and if she had once come in sight of the deserters, she would have overhauled them in short order; but the trouble was to get on the track of them. There was a good deal of territory in the bay—it was about a hundred miles long and half as wide—and there were many good hiding-places to be found among the numerous islands that were scattered about in it. For five days they sailed about from point to point, but could gain no tidings of Enoch and his crowd. The island farmers, of whom they made inquiries, declared that Captain Mack and his squad were the only academy boys who had been seen on the bay that summer. If the deserters had left the corn-fields and melon-patches alone, their pursuers might not have been able to get on their track at all; but one irate truck-gardener, whom they had despoiled of nearly a cart-load of fine watermelons which were in prime condition for the Oxford market, gave them the needed information, and after that their work was easy. They traced the Sylph from island to island, gaining on her every hour, and would have overhauled her before the close of the day on which the storm came up, had they not been obliged to seek a safe anchorage from the gale.

During the night of the blow the little vessels were not more than five miles apart. The Idlewild made the earlier start, and if the Sylph had remained in the cove an hour longer she would have been captured there, for it was Egan's intention to coast along the lee-shore of that very island. As it was, he did not catch sight of the object of his search until she rounded the promontory and stood up the bay. Then all was excitement on the Idlewild's deck.

"Hold her to it, Burgess," said Egan to the boy at the wheel. "The Sylph's got the weather-gauge of us now, but we can soon gain the wind of her. At any rate we'll make her captain show what he's made of. Go aloft, a couple of you, and we'll set the topsails."

"Are you going to lay us alongside of her?" asked Burgess.

"Not in this sea," replied Egan. "We'll keep her company until she gets into smooth water, and then we'll bounce her. What do you see, Gordon?" he added, addressing himself to Bert who was gazing steadily at something through the glass.

"I never saw a wreck," replied Bert, handing the glass to Egan, "but if that isn't one, tossing about on the waves just ahead of the Sylph, I'd like to know what it is."

Egan looked, and an exclamation indicative of the profoundest astonishment fell from his lips. It was a wreck, sure enough, said all the boys, as the glass was passed rapidly from hand to hand, and there were people on it, too. Now what was to be done?

"Stow the topsails and lay down from aloft," commanded Egan. "We don't want any more canvas on her until we have taken care of those castaways."

Never before had the Idlewild bore so excited a party as Captain Mack and his men were at that moment, and never had she carried a more orderly one. There was not the slightest confusion among them. Those who understood Egan's hurried orders obeyed them, and those who did not, kept out of the way. When they saw that the deserters were making preparations to board the wreck, their admiration found vent in lusty and long-continued cheers.

"Who are those fellows in the dory?" Egan asked of Don, who had the glass. "They have good pluck, I must say."

"One of them is Enoch Williams, and the other is——"

Don was so utterly amazed by the discovery he had made, that he could go no further. He wiped both ends of the glass with his handkerchief to make sure that there was nothing on them to obscure his vision, and then he looked again.

"The other is Lester Brigham," said he.

His companions could hardly believe it. First one and then another took the glass, and every one who gazed through it, gave utterance to some expression of astonishment.

"I'll never again be in such haste to pass judgment upon a fellow," said Egan, after he had satisfied himself that Enoch's companion was none other than the boy who had faltered when his courage was first tested. "I have been badly mistaken in both those boys. You are going to capture the deserters, Mack, but Enoch and Lester will go back to Bridgeport with a bigger feather in their caps than you will."

Captain Mack did not feel at all envious of them on that account. He and the rest watched all their movements with the keenest solicitude, and cheered wildly every time one of the sloop's crew was released from his lashings and put into the dory. When that big wave came and washed Enoch overboard, their hearts seemed to stop beating, and every boy anxiously asked his neighbor whether or not Enoch could swim well enough to keep himself afloat until they could reach him. Their fears on that score were speedily set at rest and their astonishment was greatly increased when Egan, who held the glass, said that he could swim like a cork, that he held a little child in his arms, and that he knew enough to get beyond the influence of the whirlpool made by the wreck which was now going to the bottom.

"He's a hero!" cried Egan, after he had shouted himself hoarse. "Look out for that spar, Burgess! Get handspikes, some of you, and stand by to push her off!"

But the handspikes were not needed. Being skilfully handled the Idlewild came up into the the wind within easy reach of the spar, but never touching it, and hung there barely a moment—just long enough to give the eager boys who were stationed along the weather-rail, time to seize the swimmer and haul him aboard. He was none the worse for his ducking, while his burden lay so white and motionless in his arms that everybody thought he was dead; but he was only badly frightened, and utterly bewildered by the strange and unaccountable things that were going on around him.

"Now, then, what does a fellow do in cases like this?" exclaimed Don, who was at sea in more respects than one.

"Take the boy below and put him to bed," commanded Egan. "Pull off those wet clothes, give him a good rubbing to set his blood in motion, and then cover him up warmly and let him go to sleep. I suppose his father is among those whom you and Lester took off the wreck?"

"I think he is, and his mother too," replied

Enoch, who was wringing the water out of his coat.

"His mother!" cried Egan.

"Yes. The first one we took off was a lady."

"Who are they, and where did they come from?"

"Haven't the shadow of an idea. I don't know the name of their vessel, or whether or not any of the crew were lost. The lady was insensible, and the men were not much better off."

"Then we must run for a doctor!" exclaimed Mack.

"You can't get to one any too quick," answered Enoch. "But first, you had better send somebody off to take charge of that schooner. Jones is at the wheel, and he can't handle her in this wind."

Captain Mack lost no time in acting upon this suggestion. While the Idlewild was taking up a position on the Sylph's starboard quarter, her small boat, which had been housed on deck, was put into the water, half the squad, six of whom were capable of managing the schooner, were sent off to take charge of the prize, and the majority of the deserters were transferred to the Idlewild.

Bert Gordon, who was the only non-commissioned officer in the squad, commanded the Sylph, but Burgess sailed her. All this work was done as soon as possible, and when it was completed the two vessels filled away for the nearest village, the Idlewild leading the way. During the run the deserters fraternized with their captors, and many interesting and amusing stories of the cruise were told on both sides. The former were treated as honored guests instead of prisoners, and Mack and his men praised them without stint.

"We're all right, fellows," said Jones, when he had opportunity to exchange a word with Lester and Enoch in private. "The superintendent won't say anything to us. He can't after what we have done."

"But we didn't all do as well as Enoch did," said Lester.

"I know that. He will receive the lion's share of the honors, but the rest of us did the best we could, and if one is let off scot free, the others must be let off too. Those people would have gone to the bottom with their yacht if we hadn't sighted them just as we did; and by rescuing them we have made ample amends for our misdeeds."

All the deserters seemed to be of the same opinion, and the boys who, but a short time before, would have shrunk from meeting the gaze of their teachers, now looked forward to their return to camp with the liveliest anticipations of pleasure. There was one thing they all regretted, now that the fun was over, and that was, that the confiding Coleman had lost his situation through them. They resolved, if they could gain the ear of the Sylph's owner, to make an effort to have him reinstated. Fortunately for Coleman, this proved to be an easy thing to do.

It was twenty miles to the nearest village, but the fleet little vessels, aided by the brisk wind that was blowing, covered the distance in quick time. The moment the Sylph came within jumping distance of the wharf, one of her crew sprang ashore and started post-haste for a doctor, and shortly afterward Burgess and another of Bert's men boarded the Idlewild.

"The lady is coming around all right and wants to see her boy," said the former.

The little fellow was fast asleep in one of the bunks, and his clothes were drying in the galley; so Burgess picked him up, blankets and all, and carried him off to his mother, while his companion lingered to give Captain Mack some account of the rescued people who, he said, were able to talk now, but too weak to sit up. They were from Newport, and they were all relations of Mr. Packard, the Sylph's owner. The owner and captain of the lost sloop was Mr. Packard's brother, and the little boy was his nephew. The lady was the captain's wife. They had been out in all that storm, and after the men had worked at the pumps until their strength failed them, they had lashed themselves to the rigging in the hope that their disabled craft would remain afloat until the waves could carry her ashore.

"But she wouldn't have gone ashore," said Egan. "She would have missed the island and been carried out to sea if she had stayed above water."

"They know that," said the student, "and they know, too, that they owe their lives to the Sylph, for they would have gone down before the Idlewild could have reached them. They feel very grateful toward the dory's crew, and Mr. Packard says he will never forget the gallant fellow who saved his boy's life at the risk of his own."

These words were very comforting to the deserters. The owner of the Sylph was one of the prominent men of Bridgeport, and it was not at all likely that he would neglect to use his influence with the superintendent in behalf of the boys who had saved his relatives from a watery grave. Lester Brigham could hardly contain himself. He had won a reputation at last, and the hated Gordons were nowhere. He believed now that he would stay at the academy, and Enoch, Jones and the rest of them had about come to the same conclusion. They all wanted warrants and commissions, and who could tell but that their recent exploit would give them the favor of the teachers, who would see that their desires were gratified?

At daylight the next morning Bert Gordon sent word to Captain Mack that the doctor thought his patients were now able to continue the journey to Bridgeport. No time was lost in getting under way, and at dark they were in Oxford. The Idlewild was turned over to her owner in just as good condition as she was when she left port, and Captain Mack, after seeing the rescued people to a hotel, at which they intended to remain for a day or two in order to obtain the rest they so much needed, and sending despatches to the superintendent and Mr. Packard, took the first train for Bridgeport with the deserters and the main body of his men, leaving Bert, Egan, and six others to bring the Sylph up the river. Before she was hauled into her berth the camp had been broken, the students had marched back to the academy, and the examination was going on as if nothing had happened during the term to draw the students' attention from their books. Mr. Packard had responded to Captain Mack's telegram by going down to Oxford and bringing his relatives back with him, and the townspeople were almost as highly excited over what the deserters had done, as they were when they learned that an academy company had put down the Hamilton riot. There were some among them who declared that Enoch and Lester ought to be promoted; but the superintendent was of a different opinion. He admired their courage, but he could not lose sight of the fact that in stealing a private yacht and running off in her, they had done something for which they ought to be expelled from the academy. In fact that was the sentence that was passed upon them by the court-martial; but the superintendent set it aside, as everybody knew he would, and commuted their punishment to deprivation of standing and loss of every credit mark they had earned during the year, thus destroying their last chance for promotion.

The examination came to a close in due time, and the result astonished everybody. Don Gordon made the longest jump on record, springing from the ranks to a position "twelve yards in the rear of the file-closers, and opposite the centre of the left wing" of the battalion. In other words, he became major; Bert was made a first-lieutenant, and Sam Arkwright, the New York bootblack, was promoted to a second-lieutenancy. This was enough to disgust Lester and Enoch, and not even the satisfaction they felt at being invited to dinner and made much of at Mr. Packard's residence, could make them good-natured again. Forgetting that the position a boy occupied in that academy was determined by his standing as a student and a soldier, and not by any acts of heroism he might perform while on a runaway expedition, they laid Don's rapid promotion to favoritism, and threatened him and the teachers accordingly. As for Don, who had simply tried to behave himself, hoping for no higher round than a lieutenant's commission, he was fairly stunned; and as soon as he had somewhat recovered himself, his first thought was to enjoin secrecy upon his brother.

"Don't lisp a word of this in your letters to mother," said he. "Tell her that the result of the examination is perfectly satisfactory to both of us, and let her be content with that until she sees our shoulder-straps."

Lester Brigham pursued an entirely different course. The papers were full of the exploit the deserters had performed on the bay, and whenever he found an article relating to it that was particularly flattering to his vanity, he cut it out and sent it to his father. He wanted him and everybody else about Rochdale to know what a brave boy he was.

The examination over, two parties of students left the academy and started off to enjoy their vacation in their own way, Lester and his friends heading for Mississippi, and Curtis and *his* friends striking for the wilds of Maine. The latter had long ago sent for their guns, which arrived during their first week in camp. Bert, whose highest ambition was to bag a brace or two of ruffed grouse, carried his little fowling-piece; Don, who had an eye on the moose and caribou which, so Curtis told him, were still to be found on the hunting-grounds he intended to show them, had sent for his muzzle-loading rifle; while Egan and Hopkins were armed with the same ponderous weapons with which they had worked such havoc among the ducks and quails about Diamond Lake. To these outfits were added fly-rods, reels and baskets which they purchased in Boston, Curtis making their selections for them. The Southern boys were astonished when they handled the neat implements that were passed out for their inspection.

"I don't want this pole," said Don, who was holding an elegant split-bamboo off at arm's length. "It's too limber. It isn't strong enough to land a minnow."

"That isn't a pole; it's a rod," said Curtis. "Of course it is very light and elastic, and you couldn't throw a fly with it if it were not; but it's strong enough to land any fish you are likely to catch in Maine. I suppose you have been in the habit of yanking your fish out by main strength, haven't you? Well, that's no way to do. You'd better take it if you want to see fun."

Don took it accordingly, though not without many misgivings, and the other boys also paid for the rods that Curtis selected for them, carrying them out of the store as gingerly as though they had been made of glass. But there proved to be any amount of strength and durability in those same frail-looking rods, and their owners caught many a fine string of trout with them before the season closed.

Their journey from Boston to Dalton, which was the name of the little town in which Curtis lived, was a pleasant though an uneventful one. The last fifty miles were made by stage-coach—a new way of traveling to the Southern boys, who, of course, wanted to ride on the top. About ten o'clock at night the stage drove into the village, and after stopping at the post-office to leave the mail, and at the principal hotels to drop some of its passengers, it kept on to Curtis's home. Late as the hour was, they found the house filled with boys who had gathered there to welcome their friend who had been in a real battle since they last saw him, and to extend a cordial greeting to the comrades he had brought with him. They were introduced to the new-comers, one after the other, as members of *The Rod and Gun Club*, which, according to Curtis's way of thinking, could boast of more skillful fishermen, and finer marksmen, both at the trap and on the range, than any other organization of like character in the State. There were nearly a score of them in all, and they seemed to be a jolly lot of fellows. Some of them had performed feats with the rod and gun that were worth boasting of, and as fast as Curtis found opportunity to do so, he pointed them out to his guests, and told what they had done to make themselves famous. That tall, slender, blue-eyed boy who stood over there in the corner, talking to Mr. Curtis, had won the club medal by breaking a hundred glass-balls in succession, when thrown from a revolving trap. He was ready to shoot against any boy in the country at single or double rises, and Curtis was going to try to induce Don Gordon to consent to a friendly trial of skill with him. That fellow over there on the sofa, who looked enough like Hopkins to be his brother, was the champion fisherman. He had been up in Canada with his father, and during the sixteen days he was there, he had caught more than eight hundred pounds of fish with one rod. They were all salmon. One of them weighed thirty-two pounds, and it took the young fisherman fifty minutes to bring him within reach of the gaff. The boy who was talking with Don Gordon was a rifle shot. He could shoot ten balls into the same hole at forty yards off-hand, and think nothing of it.

"I'll just tell you what's a fact," said Egan, when he and the rest were getting ready to go to bed, "we've fallen among a lot of experts, and if we intend to keep up the good name of our section of the United States we've got to do some good work."

The other boys thought so too, but they did not lose any sleep on account of it.

CHAPTER XVII.

CASTING THE FLY.

"NOW, Curtis, bring on your moose."

"Don't be in a hurry. You don't want to crowd all your sport into the first day, do you?"

"By no means. I expect to get a moose every day."

"You mustn't do it. It's unlawful for one person to kill more than one moose, two caribou, and three deer in one season."

"I wouldn't live in such a stingy State."

"You may have to some day. Wait until Mississippi has been overrun with greedy hunters, calling themselves sportsmen, from every part of the Union, as Maine has, and see if your law-makers do not wake up to the necessity of protecting the little game they will leave you. If those pot-hunters were let alone, there wouldn't be anything for a fellow to shoot after a while. Our laws are strict."

"Are they always obeyed?"

"Of course not. Last winter a party of Indians camped on the headwaters of the Brokenstraw, and killed nearly a hundred moose. When the game-constables got after them, they ran over to Canada. But the worst destroyers of game are the city sportsmen. They shoot at everything that comes within range of their guns, throw away the trout they can't eat, and the money they pay for food and guides doesn't begin to cover the damage they do."

It was a pleasant scene that was spread out before the gaze of Don Gordon and Walter Curtis on that bright September morning. They stood upon the brink of a high bluff jutting out into one of the Seven Ponds, which, at that day, were not as widely known among the class of men whom Walter had just been denouncing as they are at the present time. There was a hotel at the lower pond, but it was patronized only by adventurous sportsmen who, as a rule, lived up to the law, and took no more fish and game than they could dispose of. The men who are willing to endure almost any hardship, who brave all sorts of weather and the miseries of "buck-board" traveling over corduroy roads, for the sake of spending a quiet month in the woods, are not the ones who boast of the number of fish they catch or the amount of game they kill. A hard fight with a three-pound trout, or a single deer brought down after a week's arduous hunting, affords them more gratification than they would find in a whole creelful of "finger-ligns," or a cartload of venison killed on the runways.

The boys were in the midst of an almost unbroken wilderness. On their right a noble forest, known only to the hardy lumberman and a few hunters and trappers, stretched away to the confines of Canada. In front was the pond (it was larger than Diamond Lake, whose sluggish waters had once floated a fleet of Union gunboats), and from the glade below them on their left arose the smoke of the fire over which some of their companions were cooking a late breakfast. A deep silence brooded over the woods, broken only by an occasional splash made by a trout as he arose to the surface of the pond to seize some unwary insect, and snatches of a plantation melody from

Hopkins, who sang as he superintended the frying of the bacon:

"Big fish flutter when he done cotch de cricket;
Bullfrog libely when he singin' in de thicket;
Mule get slicker when de plantin' time ober;
Colt mighty gaily when you turn him in de clover;
An' it come mighty handy to de nigger man nater
When he soppin' in de gravy wid a big yam 'tater!"

The Southern boys had spent just three days in Dalton, enjoying as much sport as could be crowded into that short space of time. Everybody showed them much attention, and the fathers and mothers of the other members of the club vied with Mr. and Mrs. Curtis in their offers of hospitality. The guests were elected honorary members of the club, and hunting and fishing parties were the order of the day. Don caught his first brook-trout with the little rod whose strength he so much doubted. Bert knocked over a brace or two of ruffed grouse, and one of the club, having heard the visitors say that they didn't know what a corn-husking was, found a farmer who had some of last year's crop on hand, and got up one for their especial benefit. There was a large party of people, young and old, assembled in the barn in which the husking was done, and the Southerners, who were not at all bashful or afraid of pretty girls, had any amount of fun over the red ears of which there seemed to be an abundant supply. On Saturday there was glass-ball shooting on the grounds of the club in the presence of invited guests, and although Don Gordon did not succeed in beating the champion, he did some shooting with the rifle that made the club open their eyes. Using Curtis's Stevens he broke all the spots out of the eight of clubs in eight consecutive shots, shooting off hand at the distance of fifty feet and using the open sights. This was a feat that no one on the grounds had ever seen accomplished before. Even Curtis, who was the best marksman in the club, couldn't do it, but he declared he would before he went back to the academy again.

"I tell you plainly that you've got a task before you," said Don. "The best published record is five spots in five shots, using peep sights. This is the best use that can be made of playing cards. I always keep a pack of them on hand, for they re the best kind of targets."

And that is all they are good for. If every pack of cards in the world could be shot to pieces as Don's were, there would be less swindling going on, and we should not see so much misery around us.

Don and his friends made so many agreeable acquaintances in Dalton and so thoroughly enjoyed themselves among them, that they would have been content to pass the whole of their month there; but Curtis would not hear of it. There were only ten days more in September, he said; it would take three of them to reach their camping grounds, and if they desired to see any of the hunting and fishing that were to be found in Maine, they must start at once, for their fine fly-rods would be useless to them after the first of October. The day which closed the time for trout-fishing, opened the season for moose-hunting. If Don had revealed all that was passing in his mind, he would have said that he didn't care a snap for hunting or fishing either. He had seen a pair of blue eyes and some golden ringlets whose fair owner gazed admiringly at the shoulder-straps he had so worthily won, and who interested him more than all the trout that ever swam or any lordly moose that ever roamed the forests. But he started for the camping-ground when the others did, submitted as patiently as he could to the jolting he was subjected to on the corduroy roads, and wondered what the girl he left behind him would think if she could see him now, dressed in a hunting suit that was decidedly the worse for the hard service it had seen, and wearing a pair of heavy boots, thickly coated with grease, and a slouch hat that had once been gray, but which had been turned to a dingy yellow by the smoke and heat of innumerable camp fires.

Their party had been increased by the addition of five of the members of the rod and gun club, but the lodge which Curtis and some of his friends had erected on the shore of one of the Seven Ponds, and which was modeled after Don Gordon's shooting-box, was large enough to accommodate them all. It took four wagons to transport them and their luggage to the lodge, at which they arrived on the evening of the third day after leaving Dalton. They were too tired to do much that night, but they were up at the first peep of day, and after their luggage had been transferred from the wagons to the lodge, the beds made up in the bunks, the guns and fishing-rods hung upon the hooks that had been fastened to the walls on purpose to receive them, the canoes put into the water (they had brought three of these handy little crafts with them), a blaze started in the fire-place, the chest that contained their folding-table and camp-chairs unpacked—when these things had been done, the little rustic house, which was a marvel in its way, being constructed of poles instead of boards, began to assume an air of domesticity. The teamsters who brought them to the pond took a hasty bite and departed, leaving the club to themselves. There was no patient, painstaking old cuff with them to cook their meals and act as camp-keeper, and so the young hunters had to do their own work. The first morning the lot fell upon Hopkins and two of the Dalton boys who straightway began preparations for breakfast, while the rest strolled out to look about them, Don and Curtis bringing up on the edge of the bluff where we found them at the beginning of this chapter.

"Lean hoss nicker when de punkin'-vine spreadin';
Rabbit back his ear when de cabbage-stalk bendin';
Big owl jolly when de little bird singin';

'Possum's gwine to climb whar de ripe 'simmons swingin';
Nigger mighty happy, ef he aint wuf a dollah,
When he startin' out a courtin' wid a tall standin' collah!"

sang Hopkins, as he stood in the door of the lodge; and when he shouted out the last line he shook his head at Don in a way that made the latter's face turn as red as a beet. Hopkins evidently knew where Don's thoughts were.

"Come down from there, you two," he exclaimed. "The bacon is done cooked."

The cool, invigorating morning air, laden as it was with the health-giving odors of the balsam and the pine, had bestowed upon the boys an appetite that would not permit them to disregard this invitation. They hastened down the bluff, and when they entered the lodge, they found the cooks putting breakfast on the table. They sat down with the rest, and while they ate, Curtis, who was the acknowledged leader of the party, laid out a programme for the day. There were three canoes which would accommodate two boys each (they could be made to carry four, but with so many in them there would not be much elbow-room for those who wanted to fish) and two Falstaffs to be provided for. One of them was

Hopkins and the other was Hutton, the boy who caught the big salmon in Canada. He would have to go, of course, for he knew all the best places in the pond, and he was certain to bring luck to the boy who went with him. Curtis thought he and Bert would look well together, while Hopkins and Farwell—the latter a light-weight Dalton boy and a clever fly-fisher—would make another good team. Don and Egan could have the other canoe to themselves.

"But we don't know where to go or what to do," said Egan. "You go in my place, and let me stay behind as one of the camp-keepers."

"*I* am laying out this programme," replied Curtis, speaking in the pompous tone that Professor Odenheimer always assumed when he wanted to say something impressive.

"I know it, but I can't be of any use to them," continued Egan. "Some rioter, on the evening of the 23d of last July, put it out of my power to handle a paddle or a rod for some time to come.

As Egan said this he held up his bandaged hand. His injuries were by no means so serious as everybody thought they were going to be, but still the wounded member was not of much use to him. When he found that he was to be one of Mack's squad, he frankly told the young officer that he could not help him; but Mack would have taken him if he had no hands at all, for he was fond of his company. He was afterward glad that he did take him, for no one could have handled the Idlewild during the pursuit with greater skill than Egan did. If they had had much walking to do Hopkins' weak ankle would have given out; but he did full duty as a foremast hand, and proved to be of as much use as anybody.

"We don't expect you to do any work," said Curtis. "Let Don work, and you sit by and see the fun. Either one of the other boats will lead you to a good fishing-ground. Then all Don will have to do will be to watch Hutton or Farwell and do just as he does, and he'll be sure to get a rise; but whether or not he will catch a trout I can't say."

Breakfast being over the boys paired off as Curtis had instructed, launched the canoes and paddled away, Bert and his fat mentor, Hutton, going toward the lower end of the pond, and the others turning toward the upper end. The fish were breaking water on all sides of them, but Farwell did not stop until he and Hopkins had run their canoe into a little cove at the further end of the pond, which was fed by clear cold streams that came down from the hills.

"In warm weather this is the best fishing-ground I know of," said he, as he beckoned Don to come alongside, "and I don't think it is too late in the season to have a little fun here now. You see, trout like cold water, and they find plenty of it here. Now, Gordon, if you will let me see your fly-book, I will make a selection for you while you are putting your rod together.

Don handed over the book which contained about three dozen flies that Curtis had picked out for him in Boston. He did not know the name of a single one of them, but Farwell did, and after running his eye over them he said that Don had a very good assortment.

"As it is broad daylight we want small flies," Farwell remarked. "The sun doesn't shine very brightly, and neither is it entirely obscured by the clouds—the weather is rather betwixt and between; so we will take a gaudy fly, like this scarlet ibis, for a stretcher, and a white miller for the other. Then the trout can take their choice. Now, where's your leader—a cream-colored one. Bright and glistening ones are apt to scare the fish, and they generally fail when the pinch comes. It's very provoking to have your leader break just about the time you are ready to slip your dip-net under a trout you have worked hard for. I hold that two flies on one line are enough. They are sometimes more than a novice wants to manage, especially when he catches a weed or a root with one hook and a trout with the other, or when two heavy fish take his flies at the same instant and run off in different directions. Three hooks on a line are allowable only when you are out of grub, and the trout don't run over fifty to the pound. But then we don't catch such fish in these ponds."

The Southerners listened with all their ears and closely watched Farwell, who, while he was talking, deftly fastened the flies he had selected upon the leader, bent the leader on to the line, and was about to pass the fully equipped rod back to its owner, when a large trout shot out of the water about fifty feet away, giving them a momentary glimpse of his gleaming sides before he fell back into his native element. Don withdrew the hand he had extended for the rod and looked at Farwell.

"Shall I take him for you and show you how it is done?" asked the latter.

"Yes," answered all the boys, at once.

"Well, in order to do it, I shall have to throw the flies right over that swirl. What are you going to do with that paddle, Hopkins?"

"I was going to pull the canoe up nearer," replied the latter.

"I don't care to go any nearer."

"Why, you can't reach him from here," said Egan.

"And if you hook him he will break the rod into a thousand pieces," chimed in Don. "I know I made a mistake when I bought that flimsy little thing."

Farwell smiled but said nothing Grasping the rod in his right hand above the reel he drew off as much line as he thought he needed, and then threw the flexible tip smartly upward and backward, causing the flies to describe a circle around his head. One would have thought from his actions that he was going to strike the water with the rod, but he didn't. When the rod reached a horizontal position it stopped there, but the flies had received an impetus that carried them onward almost to the edge of the weeds, and landed them on the water as lightly as a feather and right in the center of the swirl. It was neatly and gracefully done; but before Don and his companions could express their delight and admiration, the scarlet ibis suddenly disappeared, the line was drawn as tight as a bow-string and the pliant rod was bent almost half double. Farwell had hooked his fish, and now the fun began.

The trout fought hard but he did not break the rod as Don had predicted, and neither did the boy with whom he was battling show half as much excitement as did the others who sat by and watched the contest. They had never dreamed that there was so much sport in fishing, and there wasn't in the way they generally fished, with a heavy pole and a line strong enough to jerk their prize from the water the moment he was hooked. Don, as we have said, had caught a few trout in the brooks about Dalton, but he had not done it in any such scientific way as this. Being distrustful of his rod he had seized the line and lifted the fish out by main strength—a most unsportsman-like thing to do. He closely observed all Farwell's movements, and when at last the exhausted trout was dipped out of the water with the landing-net and deposited in the bottom of the canoe, he thought he had made himself master of the art of fly-fishing. But when he came to try casting he found he was mistaken. His flies went almost everywhere except in the direction he desired to throw them, and annoyed him by catching in his coat-tail when he tried to throw them over his head; but after patient and careful practice in making short casts he finally "got the hang of the thing," as he expressed it, and after that he did better. The string of fish he took back to the lodge with him at noon was not a very large one, but the few he caught afforded him an abundance of sport, and that was just what he wanted.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

HAVING gained a little insight into the art of casting the fly, Don and his friends became eager and enthusiastic fishermen. They were on the pond almost all the time, and as they tried hard to follow the instructions that were willingly and patiently given them, and would not allow themselves to become discouraged by their numerous blunders and failures, they finally became quite expert with their light tackle. They wound up the season with a glorious catch, and then oiled their rods and put them into their cases with many sighs of regret.

"Never mind," said Curtis, soothingly. "There's no loss without some gain, and now we will turn our attention to bigger things than speckled trout. To-night we will try this"

As he spoke, he took from a chest something that looked like a dark-lantern with a leather helmet fastened to the bottom of it. And that was just what it was. When Curtis put the helmet on his head, the lantern stood straight up on top of it.

"This is a jack," said he, "and it is used in fire-hunting. As soon as it grows dark some of us will get into a canoe and paddle quietly around the pond just outside of the lilies and grass. The fellow who is to do the shooting will wear this jack on his head. It will be lighted, but the slide will be turned in front of it, making it dark. When he hears a splashing in the water close in front of him he will turn on the light by throwing back the slide, and if he makes no noise about it and is quick with his gun, he will get a deer, and we shall have venison to take the place of the trout."

This was something entirely new to the Southerners, who carefully examined the jack and listened with much interest while Curtis and his friends told stories of their experience and exploits in fire-hunting. Deer were so abundant about Rochdale that those who hunted them were not obliged to resort to devices of this kind, and in Maryland, where Hopkins lived, they were followed with hounds and shot on the runways. Egan had never hunted deer. He devoted all his spare time to canvas-backs and red-heads. They spent the forenoon in talking of their adventures, and after dinner Bert and Hutton, who had become inseparable companions, strolled off with their double-barrels in search of grouse, and Curtis and Don pushed off in one of the canoes to make a voyage of discovery to the upper pond; the former, for the first time, taking his rifle with him. He was afterward glad that he had done so, for he made a shot before he came back that gave him something to talk about and feel good over all the rest of the year.

Don and his companion paddled leisurely along until they reached the upper end of the pond, and then the canoe was turned into the weeds, through which it was forced into a wide and deep brook communicating with another pond that lay a few miles deeper in the forest. Curtis said there was fine trapping along the banks of the brook, adding that if Don and Bert would stay and take a Thanksgiving dinner with him, as he wanted them to do, they would put out a "saple line."

"What's that?" asked Don.

"Nothing but a lot of traps," replied Curtis. "When a man starts out to see what he has caught, he says he is going to make the rounds of his saple line. There are lots of mink, marten and muskrats about here, and now and then one can catch a beaver or an otter; but he's not always sure of getting him if he does catch him, for it's an even chance if some prowling luciver doesn't happen along and eat him up."

"What's a luciver?" inquired Don.

"Its the meanest animal we have about here, and is as cordially hated by our local trappers as the wolverine is by the trappers in the west. It's a lynx. A full-grown one would scare you if you should happen to come suddenly upon him in the woods; and after you had killed him and taken his hide off you would feel ashamed of yourself, for you would find him to be about half as large as you thought he was. They don't average over thirty or forty pounds—one weighing fifty would be a whopper—but they're ugly, and would just as soon pitch into a fellow as not. I have heard some remarkable stories——"

Curtis did not finish the sentence. He stopped suddenly, looked hard at the bushes ahead of him, listening intently all the while, and finally he drew his paddle out of the water and gently poked Don in the back with the blade. When Don faced about to see what he wanted, Curtis laid his finger upon his lips, at the same time slowly and silently turning the bow of the canoe toward the nearest bank. Just then Don heard twigs snapping in front of him, the sound being followed by a slight splashing in the water as if some heavy animal were walking cautiously through it. His lips framed the question: "What is it?" and Curtis's silent but unmistakable reply was: "Moose!"

For the first and only time in his life Don Gordon had an attack of the "buck-ague." His nerves, usually so firm and steady, thrilled with excitement, and his hand trembled as he laid down his paddle and picked up his rifle. He had not yet obtained the smallest glimpse of the animal, but his ears told him pretty nearly where he was.

As soon as he had placed his rifle in position for a shot, Curtis gave one swift, noiseless stroke with his paddle, sending the canoe away from the bank again, and up the stream, Don trying hard to peer through the bushes, and turning his body at all sorts of angles in the hope of obtaining a view of the quarry; but the alders were thick, and he could not see a dozen yards in advance of him, until Curtis brought him to a place where the bank was comparatively clear, and then Don discovered something through a little opening in the thicket. He raised his hand, and the canoe stopped.

"That thing can't be a moose," thought Don, rubbing his eyes and looking again. "It's too big, and besides it's black."

In twisting about on his seat to obtain a clearer view of the huge creature, whatever it was, Don accidentally touched the paddle, the handle of which slipped off the thwart and fell to the bottom of the canoe. The effect was magical. In an instant the dark, sleek body at which Don had been gazing through the opening in the bushes gave place to an immense head, crowned with enormous ears and wide-spreading palmated antlers, and a pair of gleaming eyes which seemed to be glaring straight at him. It was a savage looking head, taken altogether, but Don never took his gaze from it as his rifle rose slowly to his shoulder. He looked through the sights for an instant, covering one of the eyes with the front bead, and pressed the trigger. The rifle cracked and so did the bushes, as the animal launched itself through them toward the bank with one convulsive spring. Their tops were violently agitated for a moment, then all was still, and Don turned about and looked at Curtis.

"You've got him," said the latter, dipping his paddle into the water and sending the canoe ahead again.

"I've got something," replied Don, "but it can't be a moose."

"What is it, then?"

"I think it is an elephant."

Curtis laughed until the woods echoed.

"I don't care," said Don, doggedly. "He's got an elephant's ears."

"Do an elephant's ears stick straight out from his head, and does he carry horns?" demanded Curtis, as soon as he could speak. "Elephants don't run wild in this country—at least I never heard of any being seen about here. It's a moose, easy enough. I saw his horns through the alders, and I tell you they are beauties. If you were a taxidermist now, you could provide an ornament for your father's hall or dining-room that would be worth looking at."

It was a moose, sure enough, as the boys found when they paddled around the bushes and landed on the bank above them. There he lay, shot through the brain, and looking larger than he did when he was alive. His shape was clumsy and uncouth, but his agility must have been something wonderful; his expiring effort certainly was. He lay fully six feet from the bank, which was about five feet in height. The place where he had been feeding, which was pointed out to the boys by the muddy water and by the trampled lilies and pickerel grass, was thirty feet from the foot of the bank; so the moose, with a ball in his brain, must have cleared at least thirty-six feet at one jump. His long, slender legs did not look as though they were strong enough to support so ponderous a body, to say nothing of sending it through the air in that fashion.

"Do you know that I was afraid of him?" said Don, after he had feasted his eyes upon his prize and entered in his note-book some measurements he had made. "When he was staring at me through those bushes, I thought I had never seen so savage a looking beast in all my life."

"He was savage, and you had good reason to be afraid of him," answered Curtis, quickly. "If you had wounded him he would have trampled us out of sight in the brook before we knew what hurt us. When his horns are in the velvet the moose is a timid and retiring animal; but after his antlers are fully grown, and he has sharpened and polished them by constant rubbing against the trees, he loses his fear of man and everything else, and would rather fight than eat. Now you would like to have Bert and the rest see him, I suppose. Well, if you will stay here and watch him, I will go down and bring them up. We'll camp here to-night, for we shall have to cut the moose up before we can take him away. He's heavy, and weighs close to seven or eight hundred pounds."

Don agreeing to this proposition, Curtis stepped into the canoe and paddled toward the pond, not forgetting to leave the axe they had brought with them so that his companion could start a fire and build a shanty during his absence. But Don was in no hurry to go to work. He was so highly elated at his success that he could not bring his mind down to anything. For a long time he sat on the ground beside the moose, wondering at his gigantic proportions and verifying the measurements he had taken, and it was not until he heard voices in the brook below him that he jumped to his feet and caught up the axe. He had a cheerful fire going when his friends arrived, but there were no signs of a shanty.

"Look here," shouted Bert, as he drew his canoe broadside to the bank. "You were good enough to keep your moose until we could have a look at him, and so I brought my trophies along. You needn't think you are the only one who has gained honors to-day. What do you think of *that?*"

As Bert said this, he and Hutton lifted a queer looking animal from the bottom of the canoe and threw it upon the bank. It was about as large as an ordinary dog, rather short and strongly built, with sharp, tuffed ears and feet that were thickly padded with fur. Its claws were long and sharp, and so were the teeth that could be seen under its upraised lip. Its back was slightly arched, and as it lay there on the bank it looked a good deal like an overgrown cat that was about to go into battle. Don had never seen anything like it before.

"What in the world is it?" he exclaimed.

"That's just the question I asked myself when I stumbled on him and his mate a little while ago," said Bert. "It's a luciver."

"Here's the other," cried Curtis; and a second lynx, somewhat smaller than the first, was tossed ashore. "It's the greatest wonder to me that they didn't make mince-meat of Bert, and I believe they would have done it if he hadn't been so handy with that pop-gun of his."

"Well, that pop-gun had proved itself to be a pretty good shooter," returned Bert, complacently. "You see, Don, I was beating a coppice in which Hutton told me I would be likely to flush a grouse or two, and Hutton himself was on the other side of the ridge. All on a sudden I felt a thrill run all through me, and there right in front of me, and not more than ten feet away, was this big lynx. Of course he heard me coming, but as he was making a meal off a grouse he had just killed, he didn't want to leave it. He humped up his back, spread out his claws, showed his teeth and *spit* just like a cat; and believing that he was going to jump at me, I knocked him over, giving him a charge of number eight shot full in the face. It killed him so dead that he never stirred out of his tracks, but he looked so ugly that I was afraid to approach him. While I was thinking about it, I happened to cast my eyes a little to the right, and there was his mate looking at me over a log. I gave him the other barrel, and he came for me."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Don, looking first at his brother's slender figure and then at the dead luciver's strong teeth and claws. Bert was too frail to make much of a fight against such weapons as those.

"But the luciver didn't get him," chimed in Hutton, "although he made things lively for him for a little while. I heard the rumpus, and knowing that Bert had got into trouble, I ran over the ridge to take a hand in it. When I got into the thicket there was Bert, making good time around trees, over logs and behind stumps, and the luciver was close at his heels, following him by scent and hearing, as I afterward learned, and not by sight, for Bert's shot had blinded him. While I was watching for a chance to fire at him, Bert, who was trying his best to load his gun as he ran, managed to shove in a cartridge, and after that the matter was quickly settled."

"Don got the moose, but I had the excitement," added Bert.

The young hunters ate a hearty supper that night, but they slept well after it, for they did not go to bed till they had cut up the moose, and hung the quarters out of reach of any prowling lucivu that might happen to come that way. The habits of this animal and those of the moose afforded them topics for conversation long after they sought their blankets, and the sun arose before they did.

Stowing the heavy carcass in their cranky little canoes and transporting it to the lodge occupied the better portion of the day, but they were not too tired to await the return of the fire-hunters, who set out at dark in quest of deer. They returned at midnight and reported that they had "shone the eyes" of two which they could have shot if they had been so disposed; but being sportsmen instead of butchers they could not see any sense in shooting game they could not use.

About the time they began to look for the teamsters, who had been engaged to return on a certain day and carry them and their luggage back to Dalton, they would begin fire-hunting in earnest, and procure a supply of venison for the club-dinner, which was to be eaten before the Southern boys went home.

The days passed rapidly, and every one brought with it some agreeable occupation. Curtis and the other Dalton boys took care to see that the time did not hang heavily upon the hands of the guests, and were always thinking up something new for them. The teamsters came as they promised, and found four fine deer waiting for them. The next morning the wagons were loaded, the foremost one being crowned by the antlers of Don's moose, to show the people along the road that one of their number had gained renown while they had been in the woods, and the homeward journey was begun.

If time would permit we might tell of some interesting incidents that happened in connection with the club dinner, which came off on the evening of the last day that Don and his companions spent in Dalton. To quote from some of the boys who sat down to it, "the spread was fine," so were the toasts, speeches and songs, and Don Gordon had abundant opportunity to talk to the owner of the eyes and the curls that had haunted him every day of the long month he spent at the lodge. He would have been glad to stay in Dalton always. He said he was coming back, but the excuse he gave was that he wanted another trial at glass-balls with the champion. Perhaps his friends believed that that was his only reason for desiring to return, and perhaps they didn't. At any rate they looked very wise, and exchanged many a significant wink with one another.

"Good by, boys," said Egan, when the stage-coach drew up in front of Mr. Curtis's door the next morning. "We are indebted to you for a splendid time, and we should like a chance to reciprocate. Curtis is going to spend a month with me next fall, and I should be delighted to have you come with him. Don, Bert and Hop will be there too, and we'll make it as pleasant as we can for you."

The Southern boys separated in Boston and took their way toward their respective homes, Don and Bert stopping in Cincinnati long enough to purchase a couple of revolving-traps and a supply of glass-balls, and reaching Rochdale in due time without any mishap. Their shoulder-straps created all the surprise that Don could have desired, and the latter knew by the way his mother kissed him that she was entirely satisfied with the way he had conducted himself during his last year at school. They never grew weary of talking about the fine times they had enjoyed at the lodge, and Don gave everybody to understand that he was going back to Dalton some day on purpose to win that medal from the champion. He had a right to compete for it now, for he was a member of the club.

"But you will have to win it three times before you can bring it home with you," said Bert.

"So much the better," answered Don, "for then I can see that handsome little—ah! I mean the lodge, you know."

"Yes, I know," said Bert, dryly.

"By the way, has anybody heard anything of Lester Brigham and Jones and Williams?" exclaimed Don, anxious to change the subject.

Yes, everybody had heard of them. Mr. Brigham had been industriously circulating the articles and papers that Lester had sent him, and had celebrated his son's return by giving a big supper and a party. The house was crowded, and Lester and Enoch were lionized to their hearts' content.

Don and Bert spent a portion of their next vacation at the homes of Egan and Hopkins as they had promised, seeing no end of sport and some little excitement. What they did for amusement, and what Lester and his enemies did when they returned to Bridgeport in January, shall be narrated in the third and concluding volume of this series, which will be entitled: "THE YOUNG WILD-FOWLERS."

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